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Bernard Malamud

THE LAST MOHICAN

Fidelman, a self-confessed failure as a painter, came to Italy to prepare a critical study of Giotto, the opening chapter of which he had carried across the ocean in a new pigskin leather brief case, now gripped in his perspiring hand. Also new were his gum-soled oxblood shoes, a tweed suit he had on despite the late-September sun slanting hot in the Roman sky, although there was a lighter one in his bag; and a dacron shirt and set of cotton-dacron underwear, good for quick and easy washing for the traveler. His suitcase, a bulky, two-strapped affair which embarrassed him slightly, he had borrowed from his sister Bessie. He planned, if he had any money left at the end of the year, to buy a new one in Florence. Although he had been in not much of a mood when he had left the U.S.A., Fidelman picked up in Naples, and at the moment, as he stood in front of the Rome railroad station, after twenty minutes still absorbed in his first sight of the Eternal City, he was conscious of a certain exaltation that devolved on him after he had discovered that directly across the many-vehicled piazza stood the remains of the Baths of Diocletian. Fidelman remembered having read that Michelangelo had had a hand in converting the Baths into a church and convent, the latter ultimately changed into the museum that presently was there. "Imagine," he muttered. "Imagine all that history."

In the midst of his imagining, Fidelman experienced the sensation of suddenly seeing himself as he was, to the pinpoint, outside and in, not without bittersweet pleasure; and as the well-known image of his face rose before him he was taken by the depth of pure feeling in his eyes, slightly magnified by glasses, and the sensitivity of his elongated nostrils and often tremulous lips, nose from lips di-

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vided by a mustache of recent vintage that looked, Fidelman thought, as if it had been sculptured there, adding to his dignified appearance although he was stockily built and not tall. But almost at the same moment, this unexpectedly intense sense of his being—it was more than appearance—faded, exaltation having gone where exaltation goes, and Fidelman became aware that there was an exterior source to the strange, almost tri-dimensional reflection of himself he had felt as well as seen. Behind him, a short distance to the right, he had noticed a stranger—give a skeleton a couple of pounds—loitering near a bronze statue on a stone pedestal of the heavy-dugged Etruscan wolf suckling the infant Romulus and Remus, the man contemplating Fidelman already acquisitively so as to suggest to the traveler that he had been mirrored (lock, stock, barrel) in the other's gaze for some time, perhaps since he had stepped off the train. Casually studying him, though pretending no, Fidelman beheld a person of about his own height, oddly dressed in brown knickers and black, knee-length woolen socks drawn up over slightly bowed, broomstick legs, these grounded in small, porous, pointed shoes. His yellowed shirt was open at the gaunt throat, both sleeves rolled up over skinny, hairy arms. The stranger's high forehead was bronzed, his black hair thick behind small ears, the dark, close-shaven beard tight on the face; his experienced nose was weighted at the tip, and the soft brown eyes, above all, *wanted*. Though his expression suggested humility, he all but licked his lips as he approached the ex-painter.

"Shalom," he greeted Fidelman.

"Shalom," the other hesitantly replied, uttering the word—so far as he recalled—for the first time in his life. My God, he thought, a handout for sure. My first hello in Rome and it has to be a schnorrer.

The stranger extended a smiling hand. "Susskind," he said, "Shimon Susskind."

"Arthur Fidelman." Transferring his brief case to under his left arm while standing astride the big suitcase, he shook hands with Susskind. A blue-smocked porter came by, glanced at Fidelman's bag, looked at him, then walked away.

Whether he knew it or not Susskind was rubbing his palms contemplatively together.

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"Not with ease, although I read it fluently. You might say I need the practice."

"Yiddish?"

"I express myself best in English."

"Let it be English then." Susskind spoke with a slight British intonation. "I knew you were Jewish," he said, "the minute my eyes saw you."

Fidelman, who did not look particularly Jewish, chose to ignore the remark. "Where did you pick up your knowledge of English?"

"In Israel."

Israel interested Fidelman. "You live there?"

"Once, not now," Susskind answered vaguely. He seemed suddenly bored.

"How so?"

Susskind twitched a shoulder. "Too much heavy labor for a man of my modest health. Also I couldn't stand the suspense."

Fidelman nodded.

"Furthermore, the desert air makes me constipated. In Rome I am light hearted."

"A Jewish refugee from Israel, no less," Fidelman said good humoredly.

"I'm always running," Susskind answered mirthlessly. If he was light hearted, he had yet to show it.

"Where else from, if I may ask?"

"Where else but Germany, Hungary, Poland? Where not?"

"Ah, that's so long ago." Fidelman then noticed the gray in the man's hair. "Well, I'd better be going," he said. He picked up his bag as two porters hovered uncertainly nearby.

But Susskind offered certain services. "You got a hotel?"

"All picked and reserved."

"How long are you staying?"

What business is it of his? However, Fidelman courteously replied, "Two weeks in Rome, the rest of the year in Florence, with a few side trips to Sienna, Assisi, Padua and maybe also Venice."

"You wish a guide in Rome?"

"Are you a guide?"

"Why not?"

"No," said Fidelman. "I'll look as I go along to museums, libraries, et cetera."

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This caught Susskind's attention. "What are you, a professor?"

Fidelman couldn't help blushing. "Not exactly, really just a student."

"From which institution?"

He coughed a little. "By that I mean a professional student, you might say. Call me Trofimov, from Chekhov. If there's something to learn I want to learn it."

"You have some kind of a project?" the other persisted. "A grant?"

"No grant. My money is hard earned. I worked and saved a long time to take a year in Italy. I made certain sacrifices. As for a project, I'm writing on the painter Giotto. He was one of the most important—"

"You don't have to tell me about Giotto," Susskind interrupted with a little smile.

"You've studied his work?"

"Who doesn't know Giotto?"

"That's interesting to me," said Fidelman, secretly irritated. "How do you happen to know him?"

"How do you?"

"I've given a good deal of time and study to his work."

"So I know him, too."

I'd better get this over with before it begins to amount up to something, Fidelman thought. He set down his bag and fished with a finger in his leather coin purse. The two porters watched with interest, one taking a sandwich out of his pocket, unwrapping the newspaper, and beginning to eat.

"This is for yourself," Fidelman said.

Susskind hardly glanced at the coin as he let it drop into his pants pocket. The porters then left.

The refugee had an odd way of standing motionless, like a cigar store Indian about to burst into flight. "In your luggage," he said vaguely, "would you maybe have a suit you can't use? I could use a suit."

At last he comes to the point. Fidelman, though annoyed, controlled himself. "All I have is a change from the one you now see me wearing. Don't get the wrong idea about me, Mr. Susskind. I'm

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not rich. In fact, I'm poor. Don't let a few new clothes deceive you. I owe my sister money for them."

Susskind glanced down at his shabby, baggy knickers. "I haven't had a suit for years. The one I was wearing when I ran away from Germany fell apart. One day I was walking around naked."

"Isn't there a welfare organization that could help you out—some group in the Jewish community, interested in refugees?"

"The Jewish organizations wish to give me what they wish, not what I wish," Susskind replied bitterly. "The only thing they offer me is a ticket back to Israel."

"Why don't you take it?"

"I told you already, here I feel free."

"Freedom is a relative term."

"Don't tell me about freedom."

He knows all about that, too, Fidelman thought. "So you feel free," he said, "but how do you live?"

Susskind coughed, a brutal cough.

Fidelman was about to say something more on the subject of freedom but left it unsaid. Jesus, I'll be saddled with him all day if I don't watch out.

"I'd better be getting off to the hotel." He bent again for his bag.

Susskind touched him on the shoulder and when Fidelman exasperatedly straightened up, the half dollar he had given the man was staring him in the eye.

"On this we both lose money."

"How do you mean?"

"Today the lira sells six-twenty-three on the dollar, but for specie they only give you five hundred."

"In that case, give it here and I'll let you have a dollar." From his billfold Fidelman quickly extracted a crisp bill and handed it to the refugee.

"Not more?" Susskind sighed.

"Not more," the student answered emphatically.

"Maybe you would like to see Diocletian's Bath? There are some enjoyable Roman coffins inside. I will guide you for another dollar."

"No thanks." Fidelman said goodbye, and lifting the suitcase,

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lugged it to the curb. A porter appeared and the student, after some hesitation, let him carry it toward the line of small dark-green taxis in the piazza. The porter offered to carry the brief case too, but Fidelman wouldn't part with it. He gave the cab driver the address of the hotel, and the taxi took off with a lurch. Fidelman at last relaxed. Susskind, he noticed, had disappeared. Gone with his breeze, he thought. But on the way to the hotel he had an uneasy feeling that the refugee, crouched low, might be clinging to the tire on the back of the cab; however, he didn't look out to see.

Fidelman had reserved a room in an inexpensive hotel not far from the station with its very convenient bus terminal. Then, as was his habit, he got himself quickly and tightly organized. He was always concerned with not wasting time, as if it were his only wealth—not true, of course, though Fidelman admitted he was an ambitious person—and he soon arranged a schedule that made the most of his working hours. Mornings he usually visited the Italian libraries, searching their catalogues and archives, read in poor light, and made profuse notes. He napped for an hour after lunch, then at four, when the churches and museums were re-opening, hurried off to them with lists of frescoes and paintings he must see. He was anxious to get to Florence, at the same time a little unhappy at all he would not have time to take in in Rome. Fidelman promised himself to return again if he could afford it, perhaps in the spring, and look at anything he pleased.

After dark he managed to unwind himself and relax. He ate as the Romans did, late, enjoyed a half litre of white wine and smoked a cigarette. Afterward he liked to wander—especially in the old sections near the Tiber. He had read that here, under his feet, were the ruins of Ancient Rome. It was an inspiring business, he, Arthur Fidelman, after all, born a Bronx boy, walking around in all this history. History was mysterious, the remembrance of things unknown, in a way burdensome, in a way a sensuous experience. It uplifted and depressed, why he did not know, except that it excited his thoughts more than he thought good for him. This kind of excitement was all right up to a point, perfect maybe for a creative artist, but less so for a critic. A critic, he thought, should live on beans. He walked for miles along the winding river, gazing at the star-strewn skies. Once, after a couple of days in the Vatican Mu-

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seum, he saw flights of angels—gold, blue, white—intermingled in the sky. "My God, I got to stop using my eyes so much," Fidelman said to himself. But back in his room he sometimes wrote till morning.

Late one night, about a week after his arrival in Rome, as Fidelman was writing notes on the Byzantine style mosaics he had seen during the day, there was a knock on the door, and though the student, immersed in his work, was not conscious he had said "Avanti," he must have, for the door opened, and instead of an angel, in came Susskind in his shirt and baggy knickers.

Fidelman, who had all but forgotten the refugee, certainly never thought of him, half rose in astonishment. "Susskind," he exclaimed, "how did you get in here?"

Susskind for a moment stood motionless, then answered with a weary smile, "I'll tell you the truth, I know the desk clerk."

"But how did you know where I live?"

"I saw you walking in the street so I followed you."

"You mean you saw me accidentally?"

"How else? Did you leave me your address?"

Fidelman resumed his seat. "What can I do for you, Susskind?" He spoke grimly.

The refugee cleared his throat. "Professor, the days are warm but the nights are cold. You see how I go around naked." He held forth bluish arms, goosefleshed. "I came to ask you to reconsider about giving away your old suit."

"And who says it's an old suit?" Despite himself, Fidelman's voice thickened.

"One suit is new, so the other is old."

"Not precisely. I am afraid I have no suit for you, Susskind. The one I presently have hanging in the closet is a little more than a year old and I can't afford to give it away. Besides, it's gabardine, more like a summer suit."

"On me it will be for all seasons."

After a moment's reflection, Fidelman drew out his billfold and counted four single dollars. These he handed to Susskind.

"Buy yourself a warm sweater."

Susskind also counted the money. "If four," he said, "then why not five?"

Fidelman flushed. The man's warped nerve. "Because I happen

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to have four available," he answered. "That's twenty-five hundred lire. You should be able to buy a warm sweater and have something left over besides."

"I need a suit," Susskind said. "The days are warm but the nights are cold." He rubbed his arms. "What else I need I won't say."

"At least roll down your sleeves if you're so cold."

"That won't help me."

"Listen, Susskind," Fidelman said gently, "I would gladly give you the suit if I could afford to, but I can't. I have barely enough money to squeeze out a year for myself here. I've already told you I am indebted to my sister. Why don't you try to get yourself a job somewhere, no matter how menial? I'm sure that in a short while you'll work yourself up into a decent position."

"A job, he says," Susskind muttered gloomily. "Do you know what it means to get a job in Italy? Who will give me a job?"

"Who gives anybody a job? They have to go out and look for it."

"You don't understand, professor. I am an Israeli citizen, and this means I can only work for an Israeli company. How many Israeli companies are there here?—maybe two, El Al and Zim, and even if they had a job, they wouldn't give it to me because I have lost my passport. I would be better off now if I were stateless. A stateless person shows his laissez passer and sometimes he can find a small job."

"But if you lost your passport why didn't you put in for a duplicate?"

"I did, but did they give it to me?"

"Why not?"

"Why not? They say I sold it."

"Had they reason to think that?"

"I swear to you somebody stole it from me."

"Under such circumstances," Fidelman asked, "how do you live?"

"How do I live?" He chomped with his teeth. "I eat air."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously, on air. I also peddle," he confessed, "but to peddle you need a license, and that the Italians won't give me. When they

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caught me peddling I was interned for six months in a work camp."

"Didn't they attempt to deport you?"

"They did, but I sold my mother's old wedding ring that I kept in my pocket so many years. The Italians are a humane people. They took the money and let me go but they told me not to peddle anymore."

"So what do you do now?"

"I peddle. What should I do, beg?—I peddle. But last spring I got sick and gave my little money away to the doctors. I still have a bad cough." He coughed fruitily. "Now I have no capital to buy stock with. Listen, professor, maybe we can go in partnership together? Lend me twenty thousand lire and I will buy ladies' nylon stockings. After I sell them I will return you your money."

"I have no funds to invest, Susskind."

"You will get it back, with interest."

"I honestly am sorry for you," Fidelman said, "but why don't you at least do something practical? Why don't you go to the Joint Distribution Committee, for instance, and ask them to assist you? That's their business."

"I already told you why. They wish me to go back, but I wish to stay here."

"I still think going back would be the best thing for you."

"No," cried Susskind angrily.

"If that's your decision, freely made, then why pick on me? Am I responsible for you then, Susskind?"

"Who else?" Susskind loudly replied.

"Lower your voice, please, people are sleeping around here," said Fidelman, beginning to perspire. "Why should I be?"

"You know what responsibility means?"

"I think so."

"Then you are responsible. Because you are a man. Because you are a Jew, aren't you?"

"Yes, goddamn it, but I'm not the only one in the whole wide world. Without prejudice, I refuse the obligation. I am a single individual and can't take on everybody's personal burden. I have the weight of my own to contend with."

He reached for his billfold and plucked out another dollar.

"This makes five. It's more than I can afford, but take it and

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after this please leave me alone. I have made my contribution."

Susskind stood there, oddly motionless, an impassioned statue, and for a moment Fidelman wondered if he would stay all night, but at last the refugee thrust forth a stiff arm, took the fifth dollar and departed.

Early the next morning Fidelman moved out of the hotel into another, less convenient for him, but far away from Shimon Susskind and his endless demands.

This was Tuesday. On Wednesday, after a busy morning in the library, Fidelman entered a nearby trattoria and ordered a plate of spaghetti with tomato sauce. He was reading his *Messaggero,* anticipating the coming of the food, for he was unusually hungry, when he sensed a presence at the table. He looked up, expecting the waiter, but beheld instead Susskind standing there, alas, unchanged.

Is there no escape from him? thought Fidelman, severely vexed. Is this why I came to Rome?

"Shalom, professor," Susskind said, keeping his eyes off the table. "I was passing and saw you sitting here alone, so I came in to say shalom."

"Susskind," Fidelman said in anger, "have you been following me again?"

"How could I follow you?" asked the astonished Susskind. "Do I know where you live now?"

Though Fidelman blushed a little, he told himself he owed nobody an explanation. So he had found out he had moved—good.

"My feet are tired. Can I sit five minutes?"

"Sit."

Susskind drew out a chair. The spaghetti arrived, steaming hot. Fidelman sprinkled it with cheese and wound his fork into several tender strands. One of the strings of spaghetti seemed to stretch for miles, so he stopped at a certain point and swallowed the forkful. Having foolishly neglected to cut the long spaghetti string he was left sucking it, seemingly endlessly. This embarrassed him.

Susskind watched with rapt attention.

Fidelman at last reached the end of the long spaghetti, patted his mouth with a napkin, and paused in his eating.

"Would you care for a plateful?"

Susskind, eyes hungry, hesitated. "Thanks," he said.

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"Thanks yes or thanks no?"

"Thanks no." The eyes looked away.

Fidelman resumed eating, carefully winding his fork; he had had not too much practice in this sort of thing and was soon involved in the same dilemma with the spaghetti. Seeing Susskind still watching him, he soon became tense.

"We are not Italians, professor," the refugee said. "Cut it in small pieces with your knife. Then you will swallow it easier."

"I'll handle it as I please," Fidelman responded testily. "This is my business. You attend to yours."

"My business," Susskind sighed, "don't exist. This morning I had to let a wonderful chance get away from me. I had a chance to buy ladies' stockings at three hundred lire if I had money to buy half a gross. I could easily sell them for five hundred a pair. We would have made a nice profit."

"The news doesn't interest me."

"So if not ladies' stockings, I can also get sweaters, scarves, men's socks, also cheap leather goods, ceramics—whatever would interest you."

"What interests me is what you did with the money I gave you for a sweater."

"It's getting cold, professor," Susskind said worriedly. "Soon comes the November rains, and in winter the tramontana. I thought I ought to save your money to buy a couple of kilos of chestnuts and a bag of charcoal for my burner. If you sit all day on a busy street corner you can sometimes make a thousand lire. Italians like hot chestnuts. But if I do this I will need some warm clothes, maybe a suit."

"A suit," Fidelman remarked sarcastically, "why not an overcoat?"

"I have a coat, poor that it is, but now I need a suit. How can anybody come in company without a suit?"

Fidelman's hand trembled as he laid down his fork. "To my mind you are utterly irresponsible and I won't be saddled with you. I have the right to choose my own problems and the right to my privacy."

"Don't get excited, professor, it's bad for your digestion. Eat in peace." Susskind got up and left the trattoria.

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Fidelman hadn't the appetite to finish his spaghetti. He paid the bill, waited ten minutes, then departed, glancing around from time to time to see if he were being followed. He headed down the sloping street to a small piazza where he saw a couple of cabs. Not that he could afford one, but he wanted to make sure Susskind didn't tail him back to his new hotel. He would warn the clerk at the desk never to allow anybody of the refugee's name or description even to make inquiries about him.

Susskind, however, stepped out from behind a splashing fountain at the center of the little piazza. Modestly addressing the speechless Fidelman, he said, "I don't wish to take only, professor. If I had something to give you, I would gladly give it to you."

"Thanks," snapped Fidelman, "just give me some peace of mind."

"That you have to find yourself," Susskind answered.

In the taxi Fidelman decided to leave for Florence the next day, rather than at the end of the week, and once and for all be done with the pest.

That night, after returning to his room from an unpleasurable walk in the Trastevere—he had a headache from too much wine at supper—Fidelman found his door ajar and at once recalled that he had forgotten to lock it, although he had as usual left the key with the desk clerk. He was at first frightened, but when he tried the armadio in which he kept his clothes and suitcase, it was shut tight. Hastily unlocking it, he was relieved to see his blue gabardine suit—a one-button jacket affair, the trousers a little frayed on the cuffs, but all in good shape and usable for years to come—hanging amid some shirts the maid had pressed for him; and when he examined the contents of the suitcase he found nothing missing, including, thank God, his passport and travelers' checks. Gazing around the room, Fidelman saw all in place. Satisfied, he picked up a book and read ten pages before he thought of his brief case. He jumped to his feet and began to search everywhere, remembering distinctly that it had been on the night table as he had lain on the bed that afternoon, rereading his chapter. He searched under the bed and behind the night table, then again throughout the room, even on top of and behind the armadio. Fidelman hopelessly opened every drawer, no matter how small, but found neither the brief case, nor, what was worse, the chapter in it.

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With a groan he sank down on the bed, insulting himself for not having made a copy of the manuscript, for he had more than once warned himself that something like this might happen to it. But he hadn't because there were some revisions he had contemplated making, and he had planned to retype the entire chapter before beginning the next. He thought now of complaining to the owner of the hotel, who lived on the floor below, but it was already past midnight and he realized nothing could be done until morning. Who could have taken it? The maid or hall porter? It seemed unlikely they would risk their jobs to steal a piece of leather goods that would bring them only a few thousand lire in a pawnshop. Possibly a sneak thief? He would ask tomorrow if other persons on the floor were missing something. He somehow doubted it. If a thief, he would then and there have ditched the chapter and stuffed the brief case with Fidelman's oxblood shoes, left by the bed, and the fifteen-dollar R. H. Macy sweater that lay in full view of the desk. But if not the maid or porter or a sneak thief, then who? Though Fidelman had not the slightest shred of evidence to support his suspicions he could think of only one person—Susskind. This thought stung him. But if Susskind, why? Out of pique, perhaps, that he had not been given the suit he had coveted, nor was able to pry it out of the armadio? Try as he would, Fidelman could think of no one else and no other reason. Somehow the peddler had followed him home (he suspected their meeting at the fountain) and had got into his room while he was out to supper.

Fidelman's sleep that night was wretched. He dreamed of pursuing the refugee in the Jewish catacombs under the ancient Appian Way, threatening him a blow on the presumptuous head with a seven-flamed candelabrum he clutched in his hand; while Susskind, clever ghost, who knew the ins and outs of all the crypts and alleys, eluded him at every turn. Then Fidelman's candles all blew out, leaving him sightless and alone in the cemeterial dark; but when the student arose in the morning and wearily drew up the blinds, the yellow Italian sun winked him cheerfully in both bleary eyes.

Fidelman postponed going to Florence. He reported his loss to the Questura, and though the police were polite and eager to help, they could do nothing for him. On the form on which the inspector noted the complaint, he listed the brief case as worth ten thousand lire, and for "valore del manuscritto" he drew a line. Fidelman, after

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giving the matter a good deal of thought, did not report Susskind; first, because he had absolutely no proof, for the desk clerk swore he had seen no stranger around in knickers; second, because he was afraid of the consequences for the refugee if he were written down "suspected thief" as well as "unlicensed peddler" and inveterate refugee. He tried instead to rewrite the chapter, which he felt sure he knew by heart, but when he sat down at the desk, there were important thoughts, whole paragraphs, even pages, that went blank in the mind. He considered sending to America for his notes for the chapter but they were in a barrel in his sister's attic in Levittown, among many notes for other projects. The thought of Bessie, a mother of five, poking around in his things, and the work entailed in sorting the cards, then getting them packaged and mailed to him across the ocean, wearied Fidelman unspeakably; he was certain she would send the wrong ones. He laid down his pen and went into the street, seeking Susskind. He searched for him in neighborhoods where he had seen him before, and though Fidelman spent hours looking, literally days, Susskind never appeared; or if he perhaps did, the sight of Fidelman caused him to vanish. And when the student inquired about him at the Israeli consulate, the clerk, a new man on the job, said he had no record of such a person or his lost passport; on the other hand, he was known at the Joint Distribution Committee, but by name and address only—an impossibility, Fidelman thought. They gave him a number to go to but the place had long since been torn down to make way for an apartment house.

Time went without work, without accomplishment. To put an end to this appalling waste Fidelman tried to force himself back into his routine of research and picture viewing. He moved out of the hotel, which he now could not stand for the harm it had done him (leaving a telephone number and urging he be called if the slightest clue turned up), and he took a room in a small pensione near the Stazione and here had breakfast and supper rather than go out. He was much concerned with expenditures and carefully recorded them in a notebook he had acquired for the purpose. Nights, instead of wandering in the city, feasting himself upon its beauty and mystery, he kept his eyes glued to paper, sitting steadfastly at his desk in an attempt to recreate his initial chapter, because he was lost without a beginning. He had tried writing the second chapter from notes

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in his possession but it had come to nothing. Always Fidelman needed something solid behind him before he could advance, some worthwhile accomplishment upon which to build another. He worked late, but his mood, or inspiration, or whatever it was, had deserted him, leaving him with growing anxiety, almost disorientation; of not knowing—it seemed to him for the first time in months—what he must do next, a feeling that was torture. Therefore he again took up his search for the refugee. He thought now that once he had settled it, knew that the man had or hadn't stolen his chapter—whether he recovered it or not seemed at the moment immaterial—just the knowing of it would ease his mind and again he would *feel* like working, the crucial element.

Daily he combed the crowded streets, searching for Susskind wherever people peddled. On successive Sunday mornings he took the long ride to the Porta Portese market and hunted for hours among the piles of second-hand goods and junk lining the back streets, hoping his brief case would magically appear, though it never did. He visited the open market at Piazza Fontanella Borghese, and observed the ambulant vendors at Piazza Dante. He looked among fruit and vegetable stalls set up in the streets, whenever he chanced upon them, and dawdled on busy street corners after dark, among beggars and fly-by-night peddlers. After the first cold snap at the end of October, when the chestnut sellers appeared throughout the city, huddled over pails of glowing coals, he sought in their faces the missing Susskind. Where in all of modern and ancient Rome was he? The man lived in the open air—he had to appear somewhere. Sometimes when riding in a bus or tram, Fidelman thought he had glimpsed somebody in a crowd, dressed in the refugee's clothes, and he invariably got off to run after whoever it was—once a man standing in front of the Banco di Santo Spirito, gone when Fidelman breathlessly arrived; and another time he overtook a person in knickers, but this one wore a monocle. Sir Ian Susskind?

In November it rained. Fidelman wore a blue beret with his trench coat and a pair of black Italian shoes, smaller, despite their pointed toes, than his burly oxbloods which overheated his feet and whose color he detested. But instead of visiting museums he frequented movie houses, sitting in the cheapest seats and regretting the cost. He was, at odd hours in certain streets, several times accosted

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by prostitutes, some heartbreakingly pretty, one a slender, unhappy-looking girl with bags under her eyes whom he desired mightily, but Fidelman feared for his health. He had got to know the face of Rome and spoke Italian fairly fluently, but his heart was burdened, and in his blood raged a murderous hatred of the bandy-legged refugee—although there were times when he bethought himself he might be wrong—so Fidelman more than once cursed him to perdition.

One Friday night, as the first star glowed over the Tiber, Fidelman, walking aimlessly along the left riverbank, came upon a synagogue and wandered in among a crowd of Sephardim with Italianate faces. One by one they paused before a sink in an antechamber to dip their hands under a flowing faucet, then in the house of worship touched with loose fingers their brows, mouths, and breasts as they bowed to the Arc, Fidelman doing likewise. Where in the world am I? Three rabbis rose from a bench and the service began, a long prayer, sometimes chanted, sometimes accompanied by invisible organ music, but no Susskind anywhere. Fidelman sat at a desk-like pew in the last row, where he could inspect the congregants yet keep an eye on the door. The synagogue was unheated and the cold rose like an exudation from the marble floor. The student's freezing nose burned like a lit candle. He got up to go, but the beadle, a stout man in a high hat and short caftan, wearing a long thick silver chain around his neck, fixed the student with his powerful left eye.

"From New York?" he inquired, slowly approaching.

Half the congregation turned to see who.

"State, not city," answered Fidelman, nursing an active guilt for the attention he was attracting. Then, taking advantage of a pause, he whispered, "Do you happen to know a man named Susskind? He wears knickers."

"A relative?" The beadle gazed at him sadly.

"Not exactly."

"My own son—killed in the Ardeatine Caves." Tears stood forth in his eyes.

"Ah, for that I'm sorry."

But the beadle had exhausted the subject. He wiped his wet lids with pudgy fingers and the curious Sephardim turned back to their prayer books.

"Which Susskind?" the beadle wanted to know.

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"Shimon."

He scratched his ear. "Look in the ghetto."

"I looked."

"Look again."

The beadle walked slowly away and Fidelman sneaked out.

The ghetto lay behind the synagogue for several well-packed, crooked blocks, encompassing aristocratic palazzi ruined by age and unbearable numbers, their discolored facades strung with lines of withered wet wash, the fountains in the piazzas, dirt-laden, dry. And dark stone tenements, built partly on centuries-old ghetto walls, inclined towards one another across narrow, cobblestoned streets. In and among the impoverished houses were the wholesale establishments of wealthy Jews, dark holes ending in jeweled interiors, silks and silver of all colors. In the mazed streets wandered the present-day poor, Fidelman among them, oppressed by history, although, he joked to himself, it added years to his life.

A white moon shone upon the ghetto, lighting it like dark day. Once he thought he saw a ghost he knew by sight, and hastily followed him through a thick stone passage to a blank wall where shone in white letters under a tiny electric bulb: VIETATO URINARE. Here was a smell but no Susskind.

For thirty lire the student bought a dwarfed, blackened banana from a street vendor (not S.) on a bicycle, and stopped to eat. A crowd of ragazzi gathered to watch.

"Anybody here know Susskind, a refugee wearing knickers?" Fidelman announced, stooping to point with the banana where the pants went beneath the knees. He also made his legs a trifle bowed but nobody noticed.

There was no response until he had finished his fruit, then a thin-faced boy with brown liquescent eyes out of Murillo, piped: "He sometimes works in the Cimitero Verano, the Jewish section."

There too? thought Fidelman. "Works in the cemetery?" he inquired. "With a shovel?"

"He prays for the dead," the boy answered, "for a small fee."

Fidelman bought him a quick banana and the others dispersed.

In the cemetery, deserted on the Sabbath—he should have come Sunday—Fidelman went among the graves, reading legends carved on tombstones, many topped with small brass candelabra, whilst

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withered yellow chrysanthemums lay on the stone tablets of other graves, dropped stealthily, Fidelman imagined, on All Souls' Day—a festival in another part of the cemetery—by renegade sons and daughters unable to bear the sight of their dead bereft of flowers while the crypts of the goyim were lit and in bloom. Many were burial places, he read on the stained stones, of those who, for one reason or another, had died in the late large war, including an empty place, it said under a six-pointed star engraved upon a marble slab that lay on the ground, for "My beloved father/ Betrayed by the damned Fascists/ Murdered at Auschwitz by the barbarous Nazis/ *O Crime Orribile.*" But no Susskind.

Three months had gone by since Fidelman's arrival in Rome. Should he, he many times asked himself, leave the city and this foolish search? Why not off to Florence, and there, amid the art splendors of the world, be inspired to resume his work? But the loss of his first chapter was like a spell cast over him. There were times he scorned it as a man-made thing, like all such, replaceable; other times he feared it was not the chapter per se, but that his volatile curiosity had become somehow entangled with Susskind's strange personality—Had he repaid generosity by stealing a man's life work? Was he so distorted? To satisfy himself, to know man, Fidelman had to know, though at what a cost in precious time and effort. Sometimes he smiled wryly at all this; ridiculous, the chapter grieved him for itself only—the precious thing he had created then lost—especially when he got to thinking of the long diligent labor, how painstakingly he had built each idea, how cleverly mastered problems of order, form, how impressive the finished product, Giotto reborn! It broke the heart. What else, if after months he was here, still seeking?

And Fidelman was unchangingly convinced that Susskind had taken it, or why would he still be hiding? He sighed much and gained weight. Mulling over his frustrated career, on the backs of envelopes containing unanswered letters from his sister Bessie he aimlessly sketched little angels flying. Once, studying his minuscule drawings, it occurred to him that he might someday return to painting, but the thought was more painful than Fidelman could bear.

One bright morning in mid-December, after a good night's sleep, his first in weeks, he vowed he would have another look at the Navicella and then be off to Florence. Shortly before noon he visited

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the porch of St. Peter's, trying, from his remembrance of Giotto's sketch, to see the mosaic as it had been before its many restorations. He hazarded a note or two in shaky handwriting, then left the church and was walking down the sweeping flight of stairs, when he beheld at the bottom—his heart misgave him, was he still seeing pictures, a sneaky apostle added to the overloaded boatful?—ecco, Susskind! The refugee, in beret and long green GI raincoat, from under whose skirts showed his black-stockinged, rooster's ankles—indicating knickers going on above though hidden—was selling black and white rosaries to all who would buy. He held several strands of beads in one hand, while in the palm of the other a few gilded medallions glinted in the winter sun. Despite his outer clothing, Susskind looked, it must be said, unchanged, not a pound more of meat or muscle, the face though aged, ageless. Gazing at him, the student ground his teeth in remembrance. He was tempted quickly to hide, and unobserved observe the thief; but his impatience, after the long unhappy search, was too much for him. With controlled trepidation he appoached Susskind from his left as the refugee was busily engaged on the right, urging a sale of beads upon a woman drenched in black.

"Beads, rosaries, say your prayers with holy beads."

"Greetings, Susskind," Fidelman said, coming shakily down the stairs, dissembling the Unified Man, all peace and contentment. "One looks for you everywhere and finds you here. Wie gehts?"

Susskind, though his eyes flickered, showed no surprise to speak of. For a moment his expression seemed to say he had no idea who was this, had forgotten Fidelman's existence, but then at last remembered—somebody long ago from another country, whom you smiled on, then forgot.

"Still here?" he perhaps ironically joked.

"Still," Fidelman was embarrassed at his voice slipping.

"Rome holds you?"

"Rome," faltered Fidelman, "—the air." He breathed deep and exhaled with emotion.

Noticing the refugee was not truly attentive, his eyes roving upon potential customers, Fidelman, girding himself, remarked, "By the way, Susskind, you didn't happen to notice—did you?—the brief case I was carrying with me around the time we met in September?"

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"Brief case—what kind?" This he said absently, his eyes on the church doors.

"Pigskin. I had in it—" Here Fidelman's voice could be heard cracking, "—a chapter of a critical work on Giotto I was writing. You know, I'm sure, the Trecento painter?"

"Who doesn't know Giotto?"

"Do you happen to recall whether you saw, if, that is—" He stopped, at a loss for words other than accusatory.

"Excuse me—business." Susskind broke away and bounced up the steps two at a time. A man he approached shied away. He had beads, didn't need others.

Fidelman had followed the refugee. "Reward," he muttered up close to his ear. "Fifteen thousand for the chapter, and who has it can keep the brand new brief case. That's his business, no questions asked. Fair enough?"

Susskind spied a lady tourist, including camera and guide book. "Beads—holy beads." He held up both hands, but she was just a Lutheran, passing through.

"Slow today," Susskind complained as they walked down the stairs, "but maybe it's the items. Everybody has the same. If I had some big ceramics of the Holy Mother, they go like hot cakes—a good investment for somebody with a little cash."

"Use the reward for that," Fidelman cagily whispered, "buy Holy Mothers."

If he heard, Susskind gave no sign. At the sight of a family of nine emerging from the main portal above, the refugee, calling addio over his shoulder, fairly flew up the steps. But Fidelman uttered no response. I'll get the rat yet. He went off to hide behind a high fountain in the square. But the flying spume raised by the wind wet him, so he retreated behind a massive column and peeked out at short intervals to keep the peddler in sight.

At two o'clock, when St. Peter's closed to visitors, Susskind dumped his goods into his raincoat pockets and locked up shop. Fidelman followed him all the way home, indeed the ghetto, although along a street he had not consciously been on before, which led into an alley where the refugee pulled open a left-handed door, and without transition, was "home." Fidelman, sneaking up close, caught a dim glimpse of an overgrown closet containing bed and

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table. He found no address on wall or door, nor, to his surprise, any door lock. This for a moment depressed him. It meant Susskind had nothing worth stealing. Of his own, that is. The student promised himself to return tomorrow, when the occupant was elsewhere.

Return he did, in the morning, while the entrepreneur was out selling religious articles, glanced around once and was quickly inside. He shivered—a pitch black freezing cave. Fidelman scratched up a thick match and confirmed bed and table, also a rickety chair, but no heat or light except a drippy candle stub in a saucer on the table. He lit the yellow candle and searched all over the place. In the table drawer a few eating implements plus safety razor, though where he shaved was a mystery, probably a public toilet. On a shelf above the thin-blanketed bed stood half a flask of red wine, part of a package of spaghetti, and a hard panino. Also an unexpected little fish bowl with a bony gold fish swimming around in Arctic seas. The fish, reflecting the candle flame, gulped repeatedly, thrashing its frigid tail as Fidelman watched. He loves pets, thought the student. Under the bed he found a chamber pot, but nowhere a brief case with a fine critical chapter in it. The place was not more than an ice-box someone probably had lent the refugee to come in out of the rain. Alas, Fidelman sighed. Back in the pensione, it took a hot water bottle two hours to thaw him out; but from the visit he never fully recovered.

In this latest dream of Fidelman's he was spending the day in a cemetery all crowded with tombstones, when up out of an empty grave rose this long-nosed brown shade, Virgilio Susskind, beckoning.

Fidelman hurried over.

"Have you read Tolstoy?"

"Sparingly."

"Why is art?" asked the shade, drifting off.

Fidelman, willy nilly, followed, and the ghost, as it vanished, led him up steps going through the ghetto and into a marble synagogue.

The student, left alone, for no reason he could think of lay down upon the stone floor, his shoulders keeping strangely warm as he stared at the sunlit vault above. The fresco therein revealed this saint in fading blue, the sky flowing from his head, handing an old knight in a thin red robe his gold cloak. Nearby stood a humble horse and two stone hills.

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Giotto. *San Francesco dona le vesti al cavaliere povero.*

Fidelman awoke running. He stuffed his blue gabardine into a paper bag, caught a bus, and knocked early on Susskind's heavy portal.

"Avanti." The refugee, already garbed in beret and raincoat (probably his pajamas), was standing at the table, lighting the candle with a flaming sheet of paper. To Fidelman the paper looked like the underside of a typewritten page. Despite himself, the student recalled in letters of fire his entire chapter.

"Here, Susskind," he said in a trembling voice, offering the bundle, "I bring you my suit. Wear it in good health."

The refugee glanced at it without expression. "What do you wish for it?"

"Nothing at all." Fidelman laid the bag on the table, called goodbye and left.

He soon heard footsteps clattering after him across the cobblestones.

"Excuse me, I kept this under my mattress for you." Susskind thrust at him the pigskin brief case.

Fidelman savagely opened it, searching frenziedly in each compartment, but the bag was empty. The refugee was already in flight. With a bellow the student started after him. "You bastard, you burned my chapter!"

"Have mercy," cried Susskind, "I did you a favor."

"I'll do you one and cut your throat."

"The words were there but the spirit was missing."

In a towering rage, Fidelman forced a burst of speed, but the refugee, light as the wind in his marvelous knickers, his green coattails flying, rapidly gained ground.

The ghetto Jews, framed in amazement in their medieval windows, stared at the wild pursuit. But in the middle of it, Fidelman, stout and short of breath, moved by all he had lately learned, had a triumphant insight.

"Susskind, come back," he shouted, half sobbing. "The suit is yours. All is forgiven."

He came to a dead halt but the refugee ran on. When last seen he was still running.

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THE NEGRO WRITER IN AMERICA: AN EXCHANGE

I. THE FOLK TRADITION*

Stanley Edgar Hyman

"American Negro Literature"—by which I do not mean any special body of writing but only that varied American literature produced by Negroes—has, or at least some of it has, a relation to a living folk tradition that is rare in American writing, and very much worth our study. By folk tradition, I do not mean a folksy tradition. I have in mind the dependence of writers like Yeats and Synge on Irish folk culture, not of James Whitcomb Riley or Edgar Guest on Hoosier corn. There is a whole spectrum of possible relations to a folk tradition, ranging from such unpromising connections as simple imitation and fakery, archaism or sentimentalizing, to a number of complicated, ironic, and richly rewarding connections. I propose as much as possible to confine myself to some of the latter.

Without attempting any sort of historical survey of Negro writing, I would suggest that several obviously different strains are visible. One is a body of writing largely indistinguishable from white writing, with no specifically Negro character at all, which exists in an unbroken line from the poems of Phillis Wheatley, an eighteenth-century slave and apologist for slavery, to the historical novels of Frank Yerby. A second strain has a specifically Negro character, or at least subject matter. It is the naturalism of the social protest or documentary, the account of lynching, passing, discrimination, or varieties of resistance, and its examples are legion. A third is the naturalism of the regional or folksy, which was once about watermelon eating on the old plantation, and now seems to be mostly about hair straight-

* This is a shortened version of a paper read at Brandeis University.

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ening and razor fighting in Harlem. I want to bypass these modes, and to discuss the half-dozen or so Negro writers who seem to me largely to have gone beyond any sort of mimicry or naturalism, and who in their use of literary form as an act of the moral imagination have joined the mainstream of symbolism and irony in modern literature. These Negro writers, although not all of them are from the South, clearly relate to the renaissance of white Southern writing we have seen in our day, particularly in fiction, from Faulkner to Flannery O'Connor. I shall discuss this small group of Negro writers in relation to two forms of Negro folk literature: the folk tale and the blues. Other forms, among them spirituals and ballads, sermons and speeches, rhymes and games, have comparable literary extensions, but these two must suffice to suggest some of the possibilities.

* * *

To talk about the folk tale, oddly enough, we have to begin with the familiar figure of the "darky" entertainer: Stepin Fetchit, Rochester, the Kingfish of the Amos and Andy program. His role is to parody the familiar stereotype of the Negro: stupid, ignorant, lazy, fraudulent, cowardly, submoral, and boundlessly good-natured. The comic point of the act is that the performer is not really this subhuman grotesque, but a person of intelligence and skill; in other words, a performer. Assuming this role, a smart man playing dumb, is a characteristic behavior pattern of Negroes in the South (and often in the North) in a variety of conflict situations. In *No Day of Triumph,* the reporting by a brilliant and sensitive Negro of a trip through the South in 1940, J. Saunders Redding gives us a typical example. He was driving into Kentucky with a Negro hitchhiker he had picked up when they were stopped in a strikebound mining town by a guard with an automatic rifle. Before Redding could say anything, the hitchhiker shifted automatically into just such a "coon" act:

"Cap'n, we'se goin' to Kintucky. See all dat stuff back dere, Cap'n? Well, dat stuff 'longs ter Mista Rob French, an' he sho' will raise hell ef we don' git it to him," Bill lied convincingly.

"That gittar too?" the guard questioned, already softened to a joke.

Bill grinned. "No, suh, Cap'n. Dis yere box is mine. Dis yere's ma sweetheart! If we-all hed time an' you hed time, I'd beat one out fer you," Bill said.

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"G'on. But don' stop nowheres. Don' even breathe hard," the guard said, grinning.

"No, suh, Cap'n. I ain't much of a breever noway. Jus' 'nough ter live on. No, suh. I don' want no mo' o' white folks' air den I just got ter have."

One of the memorable characters in Richard Wright's autobiography, *Black Boy,* is a Memphis elevator operator called Shorty, who specializes in playing what Wright calls "the role of a clown of the most debased and degraded type." Shorty gets quarters from white passengers by an obsequious clown act that culminates in his inviting the white man to kick his rump. When Wright, full of "disgust and loathing," asks him, "How in God's name can you do that?" Shorty answers simply, "Listen, nigger, my ass is tough and quarters is scarce." Wright's fictional use of the stereotype constitutes something like Shorty's revenge. In Wright's recent novel, *The Outsider,* the hero, Cross Damon, is a Negro intellectual and existentialist criminal of terrifying literacy and paranoia. At one point in his criminal career he needs a false birth certificate and gets it by the same darky act. Cross thinks: "He would have to present to the officials a Negro so scared and ignorant that no white American would ever dream that he was up to anything deceptive." He does so, batting his eyes stupidly, asking for "the paper that say I was born," explaining in answer to every question only that his white boss said he had better have it right away. Of course he gets it immediately. The novel explains:

And as he stood there manipulating their responses, Cross knew exactly what kind of man he would pretend to be to kill suspicion if he ever got into trouble. In his role of an ignorant, frightened Negro, each white man—except those few who were free from the race bias of their group—would leap to supply him with a background and an identity; each white man would project out on him his own conception of the Negro and he could safely hide behind it. . . . He knew that deep in their hearts those two white clerks knew that no human being on earth was as dense as he had made himself out to be, but they wanted, needed to believe it of Negroes and it helped them to feel racially superior. They were pretending, just as he had been pretending.

A comically related use of the darky act appears in Rudoph Fisher's *The Conjure-Man Dies,* which so far as I know is the only

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Negro detective story. Here there are no whites at all: victim, murderer, detective, police, and all the other characters are Negro. The darky act is thus directed not at a character in the book, but at the white reader. Shortly after the murder, an uncouth kinky-haired buffoon appears, exclaiming:

"Great day in the mornin'! What all you polices doin' in this place? Policeman outside d' front door, policeman in d' hall, policeman on d' stairs, and hyer's another one. 'Deed I mus' be in d' wrong house! Is this Frimbo the conjure-man's house, or is it the jail?"

He turns out, of course (and I hope you will forgive me for giving away the plot of a twenty-five-year-old mystery), to be the murderer, an intelligent and literate man, disguised in a wig and a "coon" act. The point here seems to be that for a Negro reader, no Negro ever talked like that to his fellows, and the character is immediately suspicious. To a white reader, Fisher apparently assumes (and probably with justice), the disguise is impenetrable because it fits white stereotypes. Writing a mystery that would mystify whites but convey the essential clue to Negro readers seems an odd burlesque equivalent to Cross Damon's obsequious aggressions.

The fullest development I know of the darky act in fiction is Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* where on investigation every important character turns out to be engaged in some facet of the smart-man-playing-dumb routine. The narrator's grandfather, who was "the meekest of men," confesses on his deathbed:

"Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yesses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open."

Dr. Bledsoe, the president of the college, a tough and unscrupulous autocrat, pretends to be a simple pious Negro for the school's white trustees, explaining to the narrator: "I had to be strong and purposeful to get where I am. I had to wait and plan and lick around. . . . Yes, I had to act the nigger!" Tod Clifton, a young intellectual in the Brotherhood, perversely turns to peddling black Sambo dolls on

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the street, singing and making them dance, and is thus himself a kind of Sambo doll when he is shot down. Rinehart, like his prototype, Melville's Confidence Man, has so many disguises—from the Reverend B. P. Rinehart, Spiritual Technologist, to Rine the sweet man and numbers runner—that we see only comic masks, and have to conjecture the master illusionist behind them. And so on, from character to character, with the narrator himself the ultimate darky act, an invisible blackness that conceals a sentient human being.

The origins of this figure in clown makeup are many. He comes immediately from vaudeville, burlesque, and the minstrel show, but behind those sources he is an authentic figure of folk tale, in fact the major figure of Negro folk tale. In one form, he is Brer Rabbit (more accurately, "Ber" or "Buh" Rabbit), who appears an innocent but can outwit fox and wolf; in another form he is John, who appears an ignorant slave but can always outwit Ole Massa. When Richard M. Dorson was collecting folk tales in Michigan, an informant told him "Rabbit always the schemey one," and an informant in Florida similarly told Zora Neale Hurston "John was too smart for Ole Massa. He never got no beatin'!" Behind both figures in American Negro tales there is the prototype of the West African trickster hero of so many cycles: Spider on the Gold Coast, Legba the creator god's son in Dahomey, Rabbit or Tortoise elsewhere. Like other trickster heroes in other folklores, he is not quite animal, man, or god, but partakes of all three natures.

If Wright, Fisher, and Ellison get the darky act from the realities (and travesties) of Negro life in America, from folk tales of Buh Rabbit and John, and ultimately from West African mythology, those are still not the only sources. The same mocking figure dances through Western literature from the *Eiron* in Greek old comedy and the Fool in *Lear* down to Holden Caulfield in J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* and Kingsley Amis's Lucky Jim. We see a related figure called into being by the hard doctrine of I Corinthians 3:19, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

In other words, when the Negro writer retreats furthest from white models and deepest into Negro folk tradition, back in fact to African myth, he is paradoxically not furthest from Western literaure, but finds himself sharing a timeless archetype with Aristophanes, Shakespeare, and St. Paul, who in turn derived it from *their* folk

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sources in myth and ritual. High Western culture and the Negro folk tradition thus do not appear to pull the writer in opposite directions, but to say the same thing in their different vocabularies, to come together and reinforce insight with insight. Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot* derives identically from the *Eiron* and Fool of drama, the Fool in Christ, and a folk figure of wisdom-in-stupidity out of Russian peasant life and lore instead of Negro.

* * *

The relationship of Negro writing to the blues is, if anything, even more immediately visible than its relationship to the folk tale, although it is much harder to describe, since the blues is an extraordinarily complicated and subtle form, much of it depending on the music, which I shall have to ignore here. Most blues songs seem to divide readily into two types, a slow lament and a faster and gayer form. The slow lament says, with Ma Rainey:

Easy rider, see what you done done,
Easy rider, see what you done done;
You made me love you, now my man done come.

or with Bessie Smith:

I was with you, baby, when you didn't have a dime,
I was with you, baby, when you didn't have a dime;
Now since you got plenty money you have throwed your good gal down.

The fast blues says, with Joe Turner:

You so beautiful, but you gotta die someday,
Oh, you so beautiful, but you gotta die someday;
All I want's a little lovin', baby, just before you pass away.

or with Jabo Williams:

Please, fat mama, take those big legs off of me,
Please, fat mama, take those big legs off of me. . . .
Those great big legs gonna drive me away,
Those big legs drive me away.

or with Rosetta Crawford:

I'm gonna get me a razor and a gun,
Cut him if he stand still, shoot him if he run;
'Cause that man jumped salty on me.

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Superficially, the choice seems to be the impossible pair of alternatives Freud gave us in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* destroy others or turn the destruction inward. Yet beyond it in the memorable blues performance there seems always to be a resolution, a transcendence, even a catharsis and cure.

The themes of the blues appear everywhere in Negro literature. One of the most predominant is the theme of leaving, travel, journey: "I'm gonna move to Kansas City"; "Some day, I'll shake your hand goodbye"; "Well, babe, goin' away and leave you by yourself"; "Pick up that suitcase, man, and travel on." Walter Lehrman, in an unpublished study of the blues (to which I am considerably indebted), finds some sort of movement away from here in eighty-three out of one hundred lyrics. This sort of aimless horizontal mobility is a constant in American Negro life, substituting for frustrated possibilities of vertical mobility: if a Negro cannot rise in a job, he can change jobs; if he cannot live well here, he can try elsewhere. The major theme of Wright's *Native Son* is Bigger's aimless running; in *The Outsider* it is the journey from Chicago to New York to start a new life that proves the impossibility of any such rebirth. In Ellison's *Invisible Man,* the movement is first the great Exodus out of the South north to the Promised Land. Then, when that fails its promises, it is a random skittering up and down Manhattan, between Harlem and "downtown," until the narrator achieves his only possible vertical mobility, significantly *downward,* into a sewer (an ironic verticality already anticipated in Wright's story "The Man Who Lived Underground").

The dramatic self-pity of the blues, as we hear it in Billie Holiday's:

My man don't love me, treats me oh so mean,
My man he don't love me, treats me awful mean;
He's the lowest man that I've ever seen.

or Pine Top Smith's:

Now my woman's got a heart like a rock cast down in the sea,
Now my woman's got a heart like a rock cast down in the sea;
Seems like she can love everybody and mistreat poor me.

is the constant note in the work of such a writer as James Baldwin. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain,* the adolescent hero, John, is ugly,

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friendless, and always the smallest boy in each class. When he encounters *Of Human Bondage* he identifies (almost inconceivably) with Mildred. In Baldwin's "Autobiographical Notes" in *Notes of a Native Son,* the author identifies himself with Caliban, and says to white Prospero, "You taught me language, and my profit on't is I know how to curse." In *Giovanni's Room* the book's most contemptible-pathetic character, Jacques, retires "into that strong self-pity which was, perhaps, the only thing he had which really belonged to him."

Accompanying the self-pity is a compensatory grandiose fantasy. In the blues, Bessie Smith sings:

Say, I wisht I had me a heaven of my own,
Say, I wisht I had me a heaven of my own;
I'd give all the poor girls a long lost happy home.

In Negro writing, the grandiose fantasy is often upward, but rarely so otherworldly as a private heaven. The nameless Negro protagonist of "The Man Who Lived Underground," after a casual and pointless robbery, papers the walls of his sewer cavern with hundred-dollar bills, hangs gold watches and rings from nails all around him, and makes the dirt floor a mosaic of diamonds. The narrator of *Invisible Man* wires *his* hole in the ground with 1,369 light bulbs covering every inch of the ceiling, and plans on five phonographs simultaneously playing Louis Armstrong's record of "Black and Blue" while he eats pink and white, vanilla ice cream covered with sloe gin. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain,* John lives in a fantasy world where he is "beautiful, tall, and popular." In his daydreams he feels "like a giant who might crumble this city with his anger; he felt like a tyrant who might crush this city beneath his heel; he felt like a long-awaited conqueror at whose feet flowers would be strewn and before whom multitudes cried, Hosanna!" Sometimes John fancies, in the direct imagery of the blues, that he has "a closet full of whisky and wine," at other times, in his family's imagery, that he is the John of Revelation, or St. Paul. His identification with Maugham's Mildred is not only self-pity but power fantasy. Baldwin writes: "He wanted to be like her, only more powerful, more thorough, and more cruel; to make those around him, all who hurt him, suffer as she made the student suffer, and laugh in their faces when they asked pity for their pain."

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The long monologue by "Flap" Conroy in Redding's *No Day of Triumph,* in its combination of bitter misery with high-spirited defiance, is almost an extended blues. Flap opposes the reality principle to blues fantasy, "*White folks* got the world in a jug an' the stopper in their hand," and then immediately denies it, "That's what *they* think." Bigger and his friend Gus in *Native Son* daydream of flying planes and dropping bombs on the white world. In *The Outsider,* this has become a vision, by a Negro in a bar, of flying saucers landing from Mars and disembarking *colored* men, come to put the white overlords of earth in their place. In Langston Hughes's *Simple Speaks His Mind,* Simple, who alternates between feeling "like I got the world in a jug and the stopper in my hand" and varieties of depression, also alternates between fury that Negroes are not allowed to run trains and fly planes, and fantasies of space flight:

Why, man, I would rock so far away from this color line in the U.S.A., till it wouldn't be funny. I might even build me a garage on Mars and a mansion on Venus. On summer nights I would scoot down the Milky Way just to cool off. I would not have no old-time jet-propelled plane either. My plane would run on atom power. This earth I would not bother with no more. No, buddy-o! The sky would be my roadway and the stars my stopping place. Man, if I had a rocket plane, I would rock off into space and be solid gone. Gone. Real gone! I mean *gone*!"

Balancing this complex of misery and compensation in the slow blues, we have the abuse and bawdry of the fast blues. Georgia White sings:

When we married, we promised to stick through thick and thin;
When we married, we promised to stick through thick and thin.
But the way you thinned out is a lowdown dirty sin.

"Speckled Red" sings:

Now you're a dirty mistreater, a robber and a cheater,
I slip you in the dozen, your pappy is your cousin,
Your mama do the Lordy-Lord.

(The reference is to "the dozens," a formalized Negro game, particularly common among children, creating what John Dollard calls "a pattern of interactive insult" by exchanging slurs on the cleanliness, odor, legitimacy, fidelity, and heterosexuality of the opponent's immediate family.) Simple and Hughes's narrator slip each other re-

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peatedly in the dozens, as do the college boys in Redding's novel *Stranger and Alone,* along with the characters in many other Negro works. There is a particularly interesting example in *Invisible Man.* The nameless protagonist, brought up on charges before a committee of the Brotherhood, is asked indignantly where he got the "personal responsibility" he claims, and automatically answers "From your ma," before he corrects himself.

Related to the theme of obscenity and abuse in the blues is a pervasive cynicism, the cynicism of "If you don't like my peaches, don't shake my tree; I ain't after your woman, she's after me"; or "Papa, papa, you in a good man's way; I can get one better than you any time of day." The Negro poet who has made this note uniquely his own is Fenton Johnson. I quote part of his poem "Tired," which catches the fast blues' mingled tones of despair and mean comedy:

I am tired of work; I am tired of building up somebody else's civilization.
Let us take a rest, M'Lissy Jane.
I will go down to the Last Chance Saloon, drink a gallon or two of gin, shoot a game or two of dice and sleep the rest of the night on one of Mike's barrels.
You will let the old shanty go to rot, the white people's clothes turn to dust, and the Calvary Baptist Church sink to the bottomless pit.
You will spend your days forgetting you married me and your nights hunting the warm gin Mike serves the ladies in the rear of the Last Chance Saloon.
Throw the children into the river; civilization has given us too many.

Along with the themes and attitudes of the blues, their techniques and diction are equally pervasive in Negro writing. In the folk blues, the formal unit is not the song but the individual stanza (what in ballad study is called the "commonplace"), and the composer or singer strings traditional stanzas together to produce his own composition. The formal organization of the blues is thus not narrative, dramatic, or logical; but lyric, thematic, and associative, like a good deal of modern poetry. A typical folk blues is "Little Brother's Blues," recorded by the Lomaxes for the Library of Con-

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gress at Texas State Penitentiary in 1934 (I omit the repeated first lines of each stanza):

Lord, you light weight skinners, you better learn to skin,
Old Mister Bud Russell, I tell you, he wants to starve the men.

O my mama, she called me, I'm gonna answer "Mam?"
Lord, ain't you tired of rollin' for that big-hat man?

She's got nine gold teeth, long black curly hair,
Lord, if you get on the Sante Fe, find your baby there.

I been prayin' Our Father, Lord, Thy kingdom come,
Lord, I been prayin' Our Father, let Your will be done.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine,
I'm gonna count these blues she's got on her mind.

Here motifs of work, compulsion and hunger, mother and rebellion, nine gold teeth and long black curly hair, train journey and baby, God's will and counting the digits, all associate thematically with doing time in a prison camp and the contrasted pole of freedom and gratifications, as T. S. Eliot associates garlic and sapphires in the mud.

The Negro poet most obviously identified with this sort of thematic and associative organization is Melvin B. Tolson, in his remarkable long poem *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia.* Allen Tate in a preface places the poem "in the direct succession" from Hart Crane's *The Bridge,* and other critics have identified its techniques with those of Eliot's *Waste Land* or Pound's *Cantos.* Reinforcing rather than denying these analogies, I would insist on its kinship to the associative organization of the blues. In any case, it is an intricate and sophisticated work, and the advance in complexity it represents can best be shown by comparing a stanza with one from its obvious predecessor, Paul Laurence Dunbar's "Ode to Ethiopia." Dunbar writes:

On every hand in this fair land,
Proud Ethiope's swarthy children stand
Beside their fairer neighbor;
The forests flee before their stroke,

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Their hammers ring, their forges smoke,—
They stir in honest labor.

Tolson writes:

And now the hyenas whine among the barren bones
Of the seventeen sun sultans of Songhai,
And hooded cobras, hoodless mambas, hiss
In the gold caverns of Falémé and Bambuk,
And puff adders, hook scorpions, whisper
In the weedy corridors of Sankoré. Lia! Lia!

Negro writers have ceaselessly attempted to define the emotional ambivalence of the blues: "grief-gayety," "melancholy-comic," "wistfulness-laughter," "making light of what actually is grave," or the blues line itself, "I'm laughing just to keep from crying." In his *Libretto,* that treasure-ship of plunder from the world's cultures and languages, Tolson uses a Yiddish phrase for this ambivalence, *"lachen mit yastchekes,"* which he translates in the notes as " 'laughing with needles being stuck in you'; ghetto laughter." "As for the laughter," a character in Redding's *Stranger and Alone* thinks, "unless one had experienced it, he cannot imagine how it rips and tears you with pain." In an interview in the *Times,* Baldwin stated what are clearly his intentions as a writer: "I have always wondered why there has never, or almost never, appeared in fiction any of the joy of Louis Armstrong or the really bottomless, ironic, and mocking sadness of Billie Holiday."

Ellison made the first critical attempt I know to relate the blues to specific Negro literature in an article on *Black Boy* entitled "Richard Wright's Blues" in *The Antioch Review,* Summer, 1945. He began by defining the form as a symbolic action:

> The Blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy, but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism.

and concluded:

> Let us close with one final word about the Blues: Their attraction lies in this, that they at once express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit. They fall short of tragedy only in that they provide no solution, offer no scapegoat but the self.

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This conception did not really fit Wright's *Black Boy* very well, but it turned out to be a remarkably accurate manifesto for Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man,* published seven years later. If we want "a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism" in a fictional image we need go no further than its final tableau of the Harlem riot of 1943. Here Ras the Exhorter, a bitter Negro nationalist, arrays himself as an Abyssinian chieftain, armed with spear and shield, and rides out against the police guns. We see the scene through the eyes of an anonymous Harlem citizen:

"Hell, yes, man, he had him a big black hoss and a fur cap and some kind of old lion skin or something over his shoulders and he was raising hell. Goddam if it wasn't a *sight,* riding up and down on this ole hoss, you know, one of the kind that pulls vegetable wagons, and he got him a cowboy saddle and some big spurs."

"Aw naw, man!"

"Hell, yes! Riding up and down the block yelling, 'Destroy 'em! Drive 'em out! Burn 'em out! I, Ras, commands you.' You get that, man," he said, " 'I, *Ras,* commands you—to destroy them to the last piece of rotten fish!" And 'bout that time some joker with a big ole Georgia voice sticks his head out the window and yells, 'Ride 'em cowboy. Give 'em hell and bananas.' "

Finally, "riding like Earl Sande in the fifth at Jamaica," Ras charges to his death.

* * * *

Negro writing, because of the special vulnerabilities and resources of Negro writers, is in a position to deal with certain ironies and ambivalences of the American condition as most white writers (at least outside the South) are not. Negro writers are, as it were, a special kind of radar to extend our vision. Wright in "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" and *Black Boy,* Tolson in the *Libretto,* Ellison in the Prologue and Epilogue to *Invisible Man,* Baldwin in *Notes of a Native Son,* have all tirelessly articulated this peculiar role, with its consequent responsibilities. The social and racial relations of America are changing radically. One has only to read Toomer's 1923 portrait of Negro life in the South in *Cane,* and its 1942 equivalent, Redding's *No Day of Triumph,* to see the changes wrought by two decades, and a comparable 1958 book would show changes about again as great. Nor does this process go on only in the United States.

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Any daily paper will show the varieties of ferment of the world's Negro peoples, and we can see its articulate consciousness in such fiction as *In the Castle of My Skin* by George Lamming of the Barbados, or *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* by the Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola.

"The artist must lose such lesser identities [as Negro] in the great well of life," Waldo Frank says in his foreword to *Cane*. That has not been the view of many Negro artists of our time. In Paris, Baldwin reports, the American Negro "finds himself involved, in another language, in the same old battle: the battle for his own identity," and this turns out to be part of a larger American quest: "The American in Europe is everywhere confronted with the question of his identity." There is a Negro character in Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* for whom identity is largely a matter of cuisine: "He would not eat watermelon, because white people called it 'the niggers' ice-cream.' Pork chops he fancied not. Nor corn pone. And the idea of eating chicken gave him a spasm." Ellison has written exhaustively on the identity problem in "Richard Wright's Blues" and elsewhere, but his most graphic account of it is a similarly culinary identification in *Invisible Man*. The narrator had always scorned Negro food, along with other backward "darky" trappings, in his effort to rise in the white world, until a moment in the middle of the book when on impulse he buys a yam from a peddler and eats it on the street. At that moment, in the magical equation of "yam" with "I am," he comes to terms with his Negro identity and folk tradition, while maintaining his quest for a fully developed human consciousness. In other words, he wants yams, but he wants to be a twentieth-century Western man eating them. It is in just this fashion that the blues, say, develop in significance; starting with the specific lament for lost love, calamity, or hard times, and ending with these events metaphoric for the most universal human condition.

The folk tradition, for the Negro writer, is like Ellison's yams, not the regression or reversion it appears to be, but another path to the most ironic and sophisticated consciousness. Tate's preface to *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia* finds that full utilization of the resources of modern poetry and language has made Tolson "not less but more intensely *Negro*." There is an almost unavoidable unconscious pun in dealing with Negro culture. A silly white Negrophile

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in Fisher's *The Walls of Jericho* says she prefers Negroes to whites because "You see, they have so much color." Margaret Just Butcher, the Negro author of *The Negro in American Culture,* makes the pun continually in what I take to be entire innocence: "The Negro observably colored the general temper and folkways of the American south"; Negro comedy "richly colored Southern local and regional culture, and eventually that of the whole nation"; a work typifies "the well-meaning, somewhat colorless accounts by white authors"; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is written in "sharp blacks and whites, no shadings." The reality behind the pun is that Negro life in America, Negro folk literature, and some Negro writing does have color in every sense; not only skin pigment, but all the rich pigmentation of the fullest possible awareness. The best Negro literature and folk literature extends our perception to a far wider spectrum. "Who knows," the narrator of *Invisible Man* asks in the book's last line, "but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" Perhaps, we can add, on some of the higher, the almost inaudible frequencies as well?

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II. CHANGE THE JOKE AND SLIP THE YOKE

Ralph Ellison

Stanley Edgar Hyman's essay on the relationship between Negro American literature and Negro American folklore concerns matters in which my own interest is such that the very news of his piece aroused my enthusiasm. Yet after reading it I find that our conceptions of the way in which folk tradition gets into literature—and especially into the novel; our conceptions of just what is *Negro* and what is *American* in Negro American folklore; and our conceptions of a Negro American writer's environment—are at such odds that I must disagree with him all along the way. And since much of his essay is given over so generously to aspects of my own meager writings, I am put in the ungrateful—and embarrassing—position of not only evaluating some of his statements from that highly dubious (but privileged) sanctuary provided by one's intimate knowledge of one's personal history, but of questioning some of his readings of my own novel by consulting the text.

Archetypes, like taxes, seem doomed to be with us always, and so with literature, one hopes; but between the two there must needs be the living human being in a specific texture of time, place, and circumstance; who must respond, make choices, achieve eloquence, and create specific works of art. Thus I feel that Hyman's fascination with folk tradition and the pleasure of archetype-hunting leads to a critical game that ignores the specificity of literary works. And it also causes him to blur the distinction between various archetypes and different currents of American folklore, and, generally, to oversimplify the American tradition.

Hyman's favorite archetypical figure is the trickster, but I see a danger here. From a proper distance *all* archetypes would appear to be tricksters and confidence men; part-God, part-man, no one

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seems to know he-she-its true name, because he-she-it is protean with changes of pace, location, and identity. Further, the trickster is everywhere and anywhere at one and the same time, and, like the parts of some dismembered god, is likely to be found on stony as well as on fertile ground. Folklore is somewhat more stable, in its identity if not in its genealogy; but even here, if we are to discuss *Negro* American folklore let us not be led astray by interlopers.

Certainly we should not approach Negro folklore through the figure Hyman calls the " 'darky' entertainer." For even though such performers as he mentions appear to be convenient guides, they lead us elsewhere, into a Cthonic labyrinth. The role with which they are identified is not, despite its "blackness," *Negro* American (indeed, Negroes are repelled by it); it does not find its popularity among Negroes but among whites; and although it resembles the role of the clown familiar to Negro variety-house audiences, it derives not from the Negro but from the Anglo-Saxon branch of American folklore. In other words, this " 'darky' entertainer" is white. Nevertheless, it might be worthwhile to follow the trail for a while, even though we seem more interested in interracial warfare than the question of literature.

These entertainers are, as Hyman explains, professionals, who in order to enact a symbolic role basic to the underlying drama of American society assume a ritual mask—the identical mask and role taken on by white minstrel men when *they* depicted comic Negroes. Social changes occurring since the 1930's have made for certain modifications (Rochester operates in a different climate of rhetoric, say, than did Stepin Fetchit) but the mask, stylized and iconic, was once required of anyone who would act the role—even those Negroes whose natural coloration should, for any less ritualistic purposes at least, have made it unnecessary.

Nor does the role, which makes use of Negro idiom, songs, dance motifs, and word-play, grow out of the Negro American sense of the comic (although we too have our comedy of blackness), but out of the white American's Manichean fascination with the symbolism of blackness and whiteness expressed in such contradictions as the conflict between the white American's Judeo-Christian morality, his democratic political ideals and his daily conduct—indeed in his general anti-tragic approach to experience.

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Being "highly pigmented," as the sociologists say, it was our Negro "misfortune" to be caught up associatively in the negative side of this basic dualism of the white folk mind, and to be shackled to almost everything it would repress from conscience and consciousness. The physical hardships and indignities of slavery were benign compared with this continuing debasement of our image. Because these things are bound up with their notion of chaos it is almost impossible for many whites to consider questions of sex, women, economic opportunity, the national identity, historic change, social justice—even the "criminality" implicit in the broadening of freedom itself—without summoning malignant images of black men into consciousness.

In the Anglo-Saxon branch of American folklore and in the entertainment industry (which thrives on the exploitation and debasement of all folk materials), the Negro is reduced to a negative sign that usually appears in a comedy of the grotesque and the unacceptable. As Constance Rourke has made us aware, the action of the early minstrell show—with its Negro-derived choreography, its ringing of banjos and rattling of bones, its voices cackling jokes in pseudo-Negro dialect, with its nonsense songs, its bright costumes and sweating performers—constituted a ritual of exorcism. Other white cultures had their gollywogs and blackamoors but the fact of Negro slavery went to the moral heart of the American social drama and here the Negro was too real for easy fantasy, too serious to be dealt with in anything less than a national art. The mask was an inseparable part of the national iconography. Thus even when a Negro acted in an abstract role the national implications were unchanged. His costume made use of the "sacred" symbolism of the American flag—with red and white striped pants and coat and with stars set in a field of blue for a collar—but he could appear only with his hands gloved in white and his face blackened with burnt cork or greasepaint.

This mask, this willful stylization and modification of the natural face and hands, was imperative for the evocation of that atmosphere in which the fascination of blackness could be enjoyed, the comic catharsis achieved. The racial identity of the performer was unimportant, the mask was the thing (the "thing" in more ways than one) and its function was to veil the humanity of Negroes thus reduced

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to a sign, and to repress the white audience's awareness of its moral identification with its own acts and with the human ambiguities pushed behind the mask.

Hyman sees the comic point of the contemporary Negro's performance of the role as arising from the circumstance that a skilled man of intelligence is parodying a subhuman grotesque; this is all very kind, but when we move in from the wide-ranging spaces of the archetype for a closer inspection we see that the specific rhetorical situation involves the self-humiliation of the "sacrificial" figure, and that a psychological dissociation from this symbolic self-maiming is one of the powerful motives at work in the audience. Motives of race, status, economics, and guilt are always clustered here. The comic point is inseparable from the racial identity of the performer—as is clear in Hyman's example from Wright's *Black Boy*—who by assuming the group-debasing role for gain not only substantiates the audience's belief in the "blackness" of things black, but relieves it, with dream-like efficiency, of its guilt by accepting the very profit motive that was involved in the designation of the Negro as national scapegoat in the first place. There are all kinds of comedy: here one is reminded of the tribesman in *Green Hills of Africa* who hid his laughing face in shame at the sight of a gun-shot hyena jerking out its own intestines and eating them, in Hemingway's words, "with relish."

Down at the deep dark bottom of the melting pot, where the private is public and the public private, where black is white and white black, where the immoral becomes moral and the moral is anything that makes one feel good (or that one has the power to sustain), the white man's relish is apt to be the black man's gall.

It is not at all odd that this black-faced figure of white fun is for Negroes a symbol of everything they rejected in the white man's thinking about race, in themselves and in their own group. When he appears, for example, in the guise of Nigger Jim, the Negro is made uncomfortable. Writing at a time when the blackfaced minstrel was still popular, and shortly after a war which left even the abolitionists weary of those problems associated with the Negro, Twain fitted Jim into the outlines of the minstrel tradition, and it is from behind this stereotype mask that we see Jim's dignity and human capacity—and Twain's complexity—emerge. Yet it is his source in

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this same tradition which creates that ambivalence between his identification as an adult and parent and his "boyish" naivete, and which by contrast makes Huck, with his street-sparrow sophistication, seem more adult. Certainly it upsets a Negro reader, and it offers a less psychoanalytical explanation of the discomfort which lay behind Leslie Fiedler's thesis concerning the relation of Jim and Huck in his essay "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!"

A glance at a more recent fictional encounter between a Negro adult and a white boy, that of Lucas Beauchamp and Chick Mallison in Faulkner's *Intruder in The Dust,* will reinforce my point. For all the racial and caste differences between them, Lucas holds the ascendency in his mature dignity over the youthful Mallison and refuses to lower himself in the comic duel of status forced on him by the white boy whose life he has saved. Faulkner was free to reject the confusion between manhood and the Negro's caste status which is sanctioned by white southern tradition, but Twain, standing closer to the Reconstruction and to the oral tradition, was not so free of the white dictum that Negro males must be treated either as boys or "uncles"—never as men. Jim's friendship for Huck comes across as that of a boy for another boy rather than as the friendship of an adult for a junior; thus there is implicit in it not only a violation of the manners sanctioned by society for relations between Negroes and whites, there is a violation of our conception of adult maleness.

In Jim the extremes of the private and the public come to focus, and before our eyes an "archetypal" figure gives way before the realism implicit in the form of the novel. Here we have, I believe, an explanation in the novel's own terms of that ambiguity which bothered Fiedler. Fiedler was accused of mere sensationalism when he named the friendship homosexual, yet I believe him so profoundly disturbed by the manner in which the deep dichotomies symbolized by blackenss and whiteness are resolved that, forgetting to look at the specific form of the novel, he leaped squarely into the middle of that tangle of symbolism which he is dedicated to unsnarling, and yelled out his most terrifying name for chaos. Other things being equal he might have called it "rape," "incest," "parricide," or—"miscegenation." It is ironic that what to a Negro appears to be a lost fall in Twain's otherwise successful wrestle with the ambiguous figure in black face is viewed by a critic as a symbolic loss of sexual identity. Surely for literature there is some rare richness here.

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Although the figure in black face looks suspiciously homegrown, Western, and Calvinist to me, Hyman identifies it as being related to an archtypical trickster figure, originating in Africa. Without arguing the point I shall say only that it *is* a trickster; its adjustment to the contours of "white" symbolic needs is far more intriguing than its alleged origins, for it tells us something of the operation of American values as modulated by folklore and literature. We are back once more to questions of order and chaos; illusion and reality, nonentity and identity.

The trickster, according to Karl Kerenyi (in a commentary included in Paul Radin's study, *The Trickster*), represents a personification of the body

"which is . . . never wholly subdued, ruled by lust and hunger, forever running into pain and injury, cunning and stupid in action. Disorder belonging to the totality of life . . . the spirit of this disorder is the trickster. His function in an archaic society, or rather the function of his mythology, of the tales told about him, is to add disorder to order and to make a whole, to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted. . . ."

But ours is no archaic society (although its archaic elements exert far more influence in our lives than we care to admit), and it is an ironic reversal that, in what is regarded as the most "open" society in the world, the license of the black trickster figure is limited by the rigidities of racial attitudes, by political expediencies, and by the guilt bound up with the white compulsion to identify with the ever present man of flesh and blood whose irremediable features have been expropriated for "immoral" purposes. Hyman, incidentally, would have found in Louis Armstrong a much better example of the trickster, his medium being music rather than words and pantomime. Armstrong's clownish license and intoxicating powers are almost Elizabethan; he takes liberties with kings, queens, and presidents; emphasizes the physicality of his music with sweat, spittle, and facial contortions; he performs the magical feat of making romantic melody issue from a throat of gravel; and some few years ago was recommending to all and sundry his personal physic, "Pluto Water," as a purging way to health, happiness, and international peace.

When the white man steps behind the mask of the trickster his freedom is circumscribed by the fear that he is not simply miming a

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personification of his disorder and chaos but that he will become in fact that which he intends only to symbolize; that he will be trapped somewhere in the mystery of hell (for there is a mystery in the whiteness of blackness, the innocence of evil, and the evil of innocence, though, being initiates, Negroes express the joke of it in the blues) and thus lose that freedom which, in the fluid, "traditionless," "classless," and rapidly changing society, he would recognize as the white man's alone.

Here another ironic facet of the old American problem of identity crops up. For out of the counterfeiting of the black American's identity there arises a profound doubt in the white man's mind as to the authenticity of his own image of himself. He, after all, went into the business when he refused the king's shilling and revolted. He had put on a mask of his own, as it were; and when we regard our concern with identity in the light of what Robert Penn Warren has termed the "intentional" character of our national beginnings, a quotation from W. B. Yeats proves highly meaningful:

> There is a relation between discipline and the theatrical sense. If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are and assume the second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may accept one from others. Active virtue, as distinct from the passive acceptance of a current code, is the wearing of a mask. It is the condition of an arduous full life.

For the ex-colonials, the declaration of an American identity meant the assumption of a mask, and it imposed not only the discipline of national self-consciousness, it gave Americans an ironic awareness of the joke that always lies between appearance and reality, between the discontinuity of social tradition and that sense of the past which clings to the mind. And perhaps even an awareness of the joke that society is man's creation, not God's. Americans began their revolt from the English fatherland when they dumped the tea into the Boston Harbor, masked as Indians, and the mobility of the society created in this limitless space has encouraged the use of the mask for good and evil ever since. As the advertising industry, which is dedicated to the creation of masks, makes clear, that which cannot gain authority from tradition may borrow it with a mask. Masking is a play upon possibility and ours is a society in which possibilities are many. When American life is most American it is apt to be most theatrical.

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And it is this which makes me question Hyman's designation of the "smart man playing dumb" role as primarily Negro, if he means by "conflict situations" those in which racial pressure is uppermost. Actually it is a role which Negroes share with other Americans, and it might be more "Yankee" than anything else. It is a strategy common to the culture, and it is reinforced by our anti-intellectualism, by our tendency toward conformity and by the related desire of the individual to be left alone; often simply by the desire to put more money in the bank. But basically the strategy grows out of our awareness of the joke at the center of the American identity. Said a very dark southern friend of mine in laughing reply to a white business man who complained of his recalcitrance in a bargaining situation, "I know, you thought I was colored, didn't you." It is across this joke that Negro and white Americans regard one another. The white American has charged the Negro American with being without past or tradition (something which strikes the white man with a nameless horror), just as he himself has been so charged by Europeans and American critics with a nostalgia for the stability once typical of European cultures; and the Negro knows that both were "mammy-made" right here at home. What's more, each secretly believes that he alone knows what is valid in the American experience, and that the other knows he knows but will not admit it, and each suspects the other of being at bottom a phony.

The white man's half-conscious awareness that his image of the Negro is false makes him suspect the Negro of always seeking to take him in, and assume his motives are anger and fear—which very often they are. On his side of the joke the Negro looks at the white man and finds it difficult to believe that the "grays"—a Negro term for white people—can be so absurdly self-deluded over the true interrelatedness of blackness and whiteness. To him the white man seems a hypocrite who boasts of a pure identity while standing with his humanity exposed to the world.

Very often, however, the Negro's masking is motivated not so much by fear as by a profound rejection of the image created to usurp his identity. Sometimes it is for the sheer joy of the joke; sometimes to challenge those who presume, across the psychological distance created by race manners, to know his identity. Nonetheless, it is in the American grain. Benjamin Franklin, the practical scientist,

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skilled statesman, and sophisticated lover allowed the French to mistake him for Rousseau's Natural Man. Hemingway poses as a non-literary sportsman, Faulkner as a farmer; Abe Lincoln allowed himself to be taken for a simple country lawyer—until the chips were down. Here the "darky" act makes brothers of us all. America is a land of masking jokers. We wear the mask for purposes of aggression as well as for defense; when we are projecting the future and preserving the past. In short, the motives hidden behind the mask are as numerous as the ambiguities the mask conceals.

My basic quarrel with Hyman is not over his belief in the importance of the folk tradition; nor over his interest in archetypes, but that when he turns to specific works of literature he tends to distort their content to fit his theory. Since he refers so generously to my own novel, let us take it as a case in point. So intense is Hyman's search for archetypical forms that he doesn't see that the narrator's grandfather in *Invisible Man* is no more involved in a "darky" act than was Ulysses in Polyphemus' cave. Nor is he so much a "smart-man-playing-dumb" as a weak man who knows the nature of his oppressor's weakness. There is a good deal of spite in the old man, as there comes to be in his grandson, and the strategy he advises is a kind of jiu jitsu of the spirit, a denial and rejection through agreement. Samson, eyeless in Gaza, pulls the building down when his strength returns; politically weak, the grandfather has learned that conformity leads to a similar end, and so advises his children. Thus his mask of meekness conceals the wisdom of one who has learned the secret of saying the "yes" which accomplishes the expressive "no." Here too is a rejection of a current code and a denial become metaphysical. More important to the novel is the fact that he represents the ambiguity of the past for the hero, for whom his sphinx-like deathbed advice poses a riddle which points the plot in the dual direction which the hero will follow throughout the novel.

Certainly B. P. Rhinehart (the P. is for "Proteus," the B. for "Bliss") would seem the perfect example of Hyman's trickster figure. He is a cunning man who wins the admiration of those who admire skulduggery and know-how; an American virtuoso of identity who thrives on chaos and swift change; he is greedy, in that his masquerade is motivated by money as well as by the sheer bliss of impersonation; he is god-like, in that he brings new techniques—electric guitars, etc.

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—to the service of God, and in that there are many men in his image while he is himself unseen; he is phallic in his role of "lover"; as a numbers runner he is a bringer of manna and a worker of miracles, in that he transforms (for winners, of course) pennies into dollars, and thus he feeds, (and feeds on), the poor. Indeed, one could extend this list in the manner of much myth-mongering criticism until the fiction dissolved into anthropology, but Rhine's role in the formal structure of the narrative is to suggest to the hero a mode of escape from Ras, and a means of applying, in yet another form, his grandfather's cryptic advice to his own situation. One could throw Rinehart among his literary betters and link him with Mann's Felix Krull, the Barron Clappique of Malraux's *Man's Fate* and many others, but that would be to make a game of criticism and really say nothing.

The identity of fictional characters is determined by the implicit realism of the form, not by their relation to tradition; they are what they do or do not do. Archetypes are timeless, novels are time-haunted. If the symbols appearing in a novel link up with those of universal myth they do so by virtue of their emergence from the specific texture of a specific form of social reality. The final act of *Invisible Man* is not that of a concealment in darkness in the Anglo-Saxon connotation of the word, but that of a voice issuing its little wisdom out of the substance of its own inwardness—after having undergone a transformation from ranter to writer. If, by the way, the hero is pulling a "darky act" in this, he certainly is not a smart man playing dumb. For the novel, his memoir, is one long, loud rant, howl, and laugh. Confession, not concealment, is his mode. His mobility is dual; geographical, as Hyman points out, but, more importantly, it is intellectual. And in keeping with the reverse English of the plot, and with the Negro American conception of blackness, his movement vertically downward (not into a "sewer," Freud notwithstanding, but into a coal cellar, a source of heat, light, power and, through association with the character's motivation, self perception) is a process of *rising* to an understanding of his human condition. He gets his restless mobility not so much from the blues or from sociology but from the circumsance that he appears in a literary form which has time and social change as its special province. Besides, restlessness of the spirit is an American condition that transcends geography, sociology, and past condition of servitude.

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Discussions of folk tradition and literature which slight the specific literary forms involved seem to me questionable. Most of the writers whom Hyman mentions are novelists, workers in a form which has absorbed folk tradition into its thematic structures, its plots, symbolism and rhetoric; and which has its special way with folklore as it has with manners, history, sociology and psychology. Besides, novelists in our time are more likely to be inspired by reading novels than by their acquaintance with any folk tradition.

I use folklore in my work not because I am Negro, but because writers like Eliot and Joyce made me conscious of the literary value of my folk inheritance. My cultural background, like that of most Americans, is dual (my middle name, sadly enough, is Waldo).

I knew the trickster Ulysses just as early as I knew the wily rabbit of Negro American lore, and I could easily imagine myself a pint-sized Ulysses but hardly a rabbit, no matter how human and resourceful or Negro. And a little later I could imagine myself as Huck Finn (I so nicknamed my brother) but not, though I racially identified with him, as Nigger Jim, who struck me as a white man's inadequate portrait of a slave.

My point is that the Negro American writer is also an heir of the human experience which is literature, and this might well be more important to him than his living folk tradition. For me, at least, in the discontinuous, swiftly changing and diverse American culture, the stability of the Negro American folk tradition became precious as a result of an act of literary discovery. Taken as a whole, its spirituals along with its blues, jazz, and folk tales, it has, as Hyman suggests, much to tell us of the faith, humor, and adaptability to reality necessary to live in a world which has taken on much of the insecurity and blues-like absurdity known to those who brought it into being. For those who are able to translate its meanings into wider, more precise vocabularies it has much to offer indeed. Hyman performs a service when he makes us aware that Negro American folk tradition constitutes a valuable source for literature, but for the novelist, of any cultural or racial identity, his form is his greatest freedom and his insights are where he finds them.

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POEMS

TWO PIECES AFTER SUETONIUS

I. Apology for Domitian

He was not bad, as emperors go, not really—
Not like Tiberius cruel, or poor Nero silly.
The trouble was only that omens said he would die,
So what could he, mortal, do? Not worse, however, than you might, or I.

Suppose you knew from long back the very hour—
"Fear the fifth hour"—and yet for all your power
Couldn't strike it out from the day, or the day from the year,
Then wouldn't you have to strike something? If you did, would you think it so queer?

Suppose you were proud of your beauty, but baldness set in,
Suppose your good leg were dwindling to spindly and thin,
Wouldn't you, like Domitian, try his "bed-wrestling" stunt
To prove immortality on what was propped to bear the imperial brunt?

Suppose you had dreamed a gold hump sprouted out of your back,
And such prosperous burden oppressed you to breath-lack;
Suppose lightning scorched the sheets in your own bedroom;
Suppose from your statue storm yanked the name-plate, and chunked it into a tomb—

Well, it happened to him. Therefore there's little surprise
That for hours he'd lock himself up to pull wings from flies.
Fly or man, what odds? He would wander his hall of moonstone,
Mirror-bright so he needn't look over his shoulder to know if he was alone.

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Let's stop horsing around—it's not Domitian, it's you
We mean, and the omens are bad, very bad, and it's true
That virtue comes hard in face of the assigned clock,
And music, at sunset, faint as a dream, is heard from beyond the burdock,

And as for Domitian, the first wound finds the groin,
And he claws like a cat, but the blade continues to go in,
And the body is huddled forth meanly, and what ritual
It gets is at night, and from his old nurse, a woman poor, non-political.

II. Tiberius on Capri

(a)

All is nothing, nothing all:
To tired Tiberius soft sang the sea thus,
Under his cliff-palace wall.
The sea, in soft approach and repulse,
Sings thus, and Tiberius,
Sea-sad, stares past the dusking sea-pulse
Yonder, where come,
One now by one, the lights of far Surrentium.
He stares in the blue dusk-fall,
For all is nothing, nothing all.

Let darkness up from Asia tower.
On that darkening island behind him, *spintriae* now stir.
In grot and scented bower,
They titter, yawn, paint lip, grease thigh,
And debate what role each would prefer
When they project beneath the emperor's eye
Their expertise
Of his Eastern lusts and complex Egyptian fantasies.
But darkward he stares in that hour,
Blank now in totality of power.

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(b)

Long back, on that goat-island, I
Once at dark stood and stared where Europe stank.
Many were soon to die—
From accidie, frolic, depravity, virtue,
Snatched, not knowing the reason, in rank
On rank hurled, on in bed, or in church, or
Dishing up supper,
Or in a dark doorway, loosening the girl's elastic to tup her,
While high in the night sky,
The murderous tear dropped from God's eye;

And faintly fore-feeling, fore-fearing, all
That to fulfill our time, and heart, would come,
I stood on the crumbling wall
Of that foul place, and my lungs drew in
Scent of dry gorse on the night air of autumn,
And I seized, in dark, a small stone from that ruin,
And I made outcry
At the paradox of powers that would grind us like grain, small and dry.
Dark down, the stone, in its fall,
Found the sea: I could do that much, after all.

Robert Penn Warren

POEM

for Miss Kathleen Hanlon

"I am cherry alive," the little girl sang,
"Each morning I am something new:
I am apple, I am plum, I am just as excited
As the boys who made the Hallowe'en bang:
I am tree, I am cat, I am blossom too:
When I like, if I like, I can be someone new,
Some one very old, a witch in a zoo:
I can be someone else whenever I think who,
And I want to be everything sometimes too:

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And the peach has a pit and I know that too,
And I put it in along with everything
To make the grown-ups laugh whenever I sing:
And I sing: *It is true*; *It is untrue*;
I know, I know, the true is untrue,
The peach has a pit, the pit has a peach:
And both may be wrong when I sing my song,
But I don't tell the grown-ups: because it is sad,
And I want them to laugh just like I do
Because they grew up and forgot what they knew
And they are sure I will forget it some day too.
They are wrong. When I sang my song, I knew, I knew!
I am red, I am gold, I am green, I am blue,
I will always be me, I will always be new!"

Delmore Schwartz

AMERICAN LIGHTS, SEEN OFF FROM ABROAD

Blue go up and blue go down
to light the lights of Dollartown

Nebuchadnezzar had it so good?
wink the lights of Hollywood

I never think, I have so many things,
flash the lights of Palm Springs

I worry like a madwoman over all the world,
affirm the lights, all night, at State

I have no plans, I mean well,
swear the lights of Georgetown

I have the blind staggers,
call the lights of Niagara

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We shall die in a palace,
shout the black lights of Dallas

I couldn't dare less, my favorite son,
fritter the lights of Washington

(I have a brave old So-and-so,
chuckle the lights of Independence, Mo.)

I cast a shadow, what I mean,
blurt the lights of Abilene

Both his sides are all the same
Glows his grin with all but shame

"He can do nothing night & day"
wonder his lovers. So they say.

"Basketball in outer space"
sneers the White New Hampshire House

I'll have a smaller one, later, Mac,
hope the strange lights of Cal Tech

I love you one & all, hate shock,
bleat the lights of Little Rock

I cannot quite focus
cry the lights of Las Vegas

I am a maid of shots & pills,
swivel the lights of Beverly Hills

Proud & odd, you give me vertigo,
fly the lights of San Francisco

I am all satisfied love & chalk,
mutter the great lights of New York

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I have lost your way.
say the white lights of Boston

"Here comes a scandal to blight you to bed.
Here comes a cropper." That's what I said.

7 October 1957

John Berryman

IN THE FLEETING HAND OF TIME

On the steps of the bright madhouse
I hear the bearded bell shaking down the woodlawn
the final knell of my world
I climb and enter a fiery gathering of knights
they unaware of my presence lay forth sheepskin plans
and with mailcoated fingers trace my arrival
back back back when on the black steps of Nero lyre Rome I stood
in my arms the wailing philosopher
the final call of mad history
Now my presence is known
my arrival marked by illuminated stains
The great windows of Paradise open
Down to radiant dust fall the curtains of Past Time
In fly flocks of multicolored birds
Light winged light O the wonder of light
Time takes me by the hand
born March 26 1930 I am led 100 mph o'er the vast market of choice
what to choose? what to choose?
Oh ———— and I leave my orange room of myth
no chance to lock away my toys of Zeus
I choose the room of Bleecker Street
A baby mother stuffs my mouth with a pale Milanese breast
I suck I struggle I cry O Olympian mother
unfamiliar this breast to me

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Snows
Decade of icy asphalt doomed horses
Weak dreams Dark corridors of P.S: 42 Roofs Ratthroated pigeons
Led 100 mph over these all too real Mafia streets
profanely I shed my Hermean wings
O Time be merciful
throw be beneath your humanity of cars
feed me to giant grey skyscrapers
exhaust my heart to your bridges
I discard my lyre of Orphic futility

And for such betrayal I climb these bright mad steps
and enter this room of paradisical light
ephemeral
Time
a long long dog having chased its orbited tail
comes grab my hand
and leads me into conditional life

Gregory Corso

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Raymond Aron

COEXISTENCE: THE END OF IDEOLOGY

Coexistence is neither a doctrine nor a desire: it is first and foremost a *fact*. Communist and democratic countries live side by side or face to face on the same planet, on the same continent, without combating each other militarily and without renouncing the beliefs and ideologies which serve, on each side, to justify the existing regime and to disparage or condemn the regime established on the other side.

The anti-Communism of the free world cannot be rigorously equated with the *ideological* aggressiveness of the Communist states. Leninism-Stalinism proclaims the inevitable destruction of capitalism (and all Western countries are included in this term, whatever the degree or form of their socialism or the strength of their labor movements) and, in this perspective, enjoins the faithful to hasten the advent of the Last Judgment. Democratic doctrine—to the extent that the word doctrine can be applied to the ideas prevalent in the West—requires no declaration of war against the states which adhere to Leninism-Stalinism; it is essentially opposed to the universalist pretentions of the enemy ideology. Should the Soviets ever recognize that their regime is only one of a number of possible ways of organizing industrial societies, the majority of democrats—while continuing to regard certain practices of the Soviet regime as deplorable, inefficient or inhuman—would no longer feel obliged to maintain an attitude of active hostility to the Soviet Union.

This proposition, that we of the West are committed to the destruction of the Soviet regime only to the extent that the latter seeks the destruction of our free societies, will be challenged or violently rejected by three categories of Westerners: extremists in anti-Communism (such as James Burnham), moralists, and representatives of Sov-

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iet-dominated countries. The opposition of the first group is based primarily on their refusal to believe in the reality or possibility of the hypothesis that Communism could abdicate its claim to universality, in other words that it could accept the existence of heretical or pagan states. What is the probability of such a conversion? This is a moot point. But logically a "Macchiavelian" should agree to peace between democratic Westerners and Russian Communism if ever and whenever the latter recognizes the right to exist of a welfare-minded capitalism, such as we have in Scandinavia or the United States.

The moralists will object that the West would deny its own values if it ceased to believe in the universal validity of its ideas. We suggest no such denial. But a free press, political parties, and a parliamentary system cannot be propagated at bayonet point or by means of intercontinental rockets. In any case, the West cannot bring about a reform of the Soviet regime, much less a revolution that would destroy it. How can the West most effectively promote the evolution of the Soviet regime? The question is open, but it is a political and not a moral one. Sounding the anti-Communist trumpets will not bring the walls down. There is no particular merit in shouting one's distaste for Communism as loudly as possible.

There remains the case of the forcibly sovietized countries of Eastern Europe, whose plight we cannot recognize as definitive. Politically, the West rejects the European status quo, so dear to Mr. Khrushchev's heart. In this sense and on this level, Western diplomacy is and must remain on the offensive. But we have neither the means nor the will to pursue this offensive by force. We know that our objective can be attained only through negotiation (the withdrawal of Soviet and American troops) or through a change in the ideas or in the methods of the Kremlin. If the Communists ceased to believe in the universal dissemination of their doctrine and their institutions, a relaxation of Russian domination over Eastern Europe would become less improbable.

There is no reason to believe, at this writing, that Soviet strategy has changed or that Mr. Khrushchev has abandoned the dogmas of the Leninist-Stalinist credo—to the effect that capitalism is bad and will die, and that Soviet Communism is good and will triumph. Can this credo be equated with the formula: Mr. Khrushchev (or the Soviet Union) is seeking world domination? The situation is not as

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simple as that. If the United States were removed from the scene by the wave of a magic wand, Russia would no longer have an opponent in her class. In this sense, she would reign supreme over the world. But does this mean that she would be able to impose her every wish on China, India, or Europe, without encountering resistance? Nobody knows. The absence of a military rival is not the equivalent of omnipotence. If all the countries of the world were Communist, conflicts between Communist countries would become possible. Such speculations aside, the major fact of the present conjuncture is that the Soviet Union's hostility to capitalism is indistinguishable from her hostility to the only power mighty enough to oppose her: the United States. And the impossibility of a definitive or even a relatively definitive settlement of the Russian-American rivalry is neither more nor less evident under Khrushchev than it was under Stalin. Such a settlement is excluded for four basic reasons: the clash of ideologies prevents the two Great Powers from simply accepting each other or legitimizing the status quo; the division of Europe constitutes a permanent cause of insecurity; the anti-Western revolt in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East works to the advantage of the Soviets (even when they play no role in it) and threatens to isolate the white minority of Europe and America; and finally, the technological weapons race seems to rule out any stabilization or limitation of armaments.

Since a global settlement is excluded, the Soviet Union and the United States must choose between total war and the cold war. During the past twelve years their choice has gone clearly and constantly to the latter. The cold war is a form of coexistence. Rhetorical stress is laid on the term when the desire is to reject total war publicly and solemnly, but during the Korean war the effort to limit hostilities also implied the rejection of total war. Mr. Khrushchev's ultimate ambitions do not prevent this total non-war or coexistence. What they prevent, now as in the past, is a formal agreement on the terms of this mutual and hostile tolerance.

* * *

Is this more or less bellicose coexistence jeopardized by the launching of Sputnik, which symbolizes the progress of Soviet science and industry and suggests a probable Russian superiority in the realm of ballistic weapons? Is the West threatened with disaster if the

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power ratio is inexorably modified in favor of the Soviet Union?

The expression "balance of power," traditional in politico-military terminology, has been gradually replaced by the "balance of terror." This change in vocabulary strikes me as meaningful. Until recently the balance was calculated on the hypothesis of a possibly prolonged war: in the event of a trial of strength, what resources could be mobilized by a given state or coalition against another? This question has lost its point, since a few H-bombs would be enough to paralyze a medium-sized country and a few dozen would inflict tens of millions of casualties on a continental state like Russia or the U.S. Would total war come to an end in a few hours or a few days, after an exchange of these monstrous projectiles? Nobody knows. All we do know is that such a war would be senseless for all concerned *unless it were waged unilaterally*. No political advantage obtained through victory could possibly match the cost of the war itself, unless one side had the technological means to protect itself from bombardment. In other words, it would be utter lunacy for a ruler to touch off a total war at the present time if he were not virtually assured of destroying the enemy's entire capacity for reprisal at one blow. Such is the definition of the balance of terror. This balance exists as long as neither side has, or rather can be assured of having, the power to destroy all means of reprisal from the opposing side.

The balance of terror, thus defined, has not been upset by the fact that the Soviets have probably taken the lead in the field of ballistic weapons. It could be decisively upset in one way only: by a simultaneous superiority in offensive and defensive power. If the Soviet Union possessed an effective defense against air attack and a monopoly of ballistic weapons at the same time, while the United States were still vulnerable to the latter, then the United States would be at the mercy of its rival.

This is not the case at present. Even if Soviet intercontinental missiles are ready for military use at this very moment—an improbable supposition—American air power, thanks to the number and dispersion of its bases, is still capable of piercing the enemy's land-based rocket barrages. At least the percentage of aircraft that could get through would be sufficient to inflict enormous devastation. Supposing, on the other hand, that the American air forces could no longer get through the rocket barrages and that Soviet intercontinental

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missiles were already in use, the West could still employ medium range weapons capable of reaching most Soviet cities. Thus, once again, the balance of terror is preserved.

We must therefore consider that a technological breakthrough in the fields of weapons, means of delivery or defense, which would make it possible for one side to impose its will on the other, is not impossible but highly improbable. In the absence of such a breakthrough, war is not precisely excluded, since an accident or a misunderstanding of the enemy's intentions is conceivable (although accidents and misunderstandings are also becoming increasingly improbable); what is excluded is the possibility that a war will deliberately be unleashed by governments possessed of their senses.

This equilibrium of terror is an integral part of coexistence as we know it. Could there be a coexistence without some such approximate equality in destructive capacity? The question is pointless since this equality is a fact and will continue to be one. Both sides would probably prefer to avoid a costly and unpredictable total war even if it were fought without nuclear weapons. The latter, in any case, can only reinforce their will to peace (or rather, their will to non-war).

The fact remains that a number of new elements have recently emerged. As long as American territory was safe, or less vulnerable to air attack than Soviet territory, the U.S. could deter local aggressions by threatening to extend the hostilities: the "massive retaliation" doctrine. Since equality has more or less been restored one hears much less talk of massive reprisals; indeed, it would sometimes appear that it is the men in the Kremlin who have taken over the term.

In other words, the more war assumes the aspect of a collective suicide the less possible it becomes to use the threat of it to stop a local aggression or to settle a secondary conflict. The threat of collective suicide can protect Western Europe because the stakes are considerable and military invasion would be a highly risky affair, but it is doubtful that it could be used to protect Israel against an Egyptian-Syrian attack. Limited wars become all the more likely as total war becomes more horrible and absurd for all concerned. To be sure, the danger that a conflict might get out of hand deters the Great Powers from using their regular armies anywhere. But if their

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armies did become engaged in a non-vital theater, the opposing governments could *reasonably* be expected to attempt to keep such conflicts within limits and to avoid using a destructive power out of all proportion to their political purposes.

* * *

Since a general settlement is excluded and the preservation of the balance of terror is probable, what are the chances of partial agreements in one or another of the regions of the world where the interests, ambitions and ideals of the two coalitions are in conflict? Let us briefly examine three of the diplomatic theaters of operations: Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East.

In Europe the situation has not fundamentally changed since 1945, except for the dissidence of Tito and the spectacular episode of the Berlin blockade. The countries liberated by the Soviet armies have been sovietized, the demarcation line drawn during the war by the diplomats in London has remained the frontier between the two worlds. The great event which has occurred in the meantime, however, will probably prove in the long run to be of decisive importance, although it is not visible on the map: Soviet Russia has failed in both phases of her dual undertaking in Eastern Europe. The subject peoples have not become resigned to Russification and the youth have not been converted to Communism. The tide of popular sentiment is running in favor of the democratic regimes and against Communism or any other sort of authoritarian regime. (In this respect, the old world is perhaps an exception, for elsewhere the new situation would seem rather to resemble that of Europe in the Thirties).

A fair-minded appraisal of George Kennan's views, as set forth in his Reith Lectures,[1] must first of all recall that they are based on one major premise: if the Europeans were free to determine their fate they would choose the West, democracy. Even the Communists in Hungary and Poland, who would probably retain collective ownership of the factories, would attempt to reintroduce free political institutions. The proposals of the former American ambassador to Moscow are designed to create a diplomatic situation within which the Europeans would manifest their preference. Such a situation, says Kennan, could be created by the withdrawal of the Russian and American armies.

In the long run it is hard to see how the unity of Europe could

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be restored except through some such diplomatic arrangement. The Western powers do not have the physical means to force the Soviet Union to give up Eastern Europe. They must therefore use persuasion, which implies some sort of exchange. One or another form of military "disengagement" would thus appear, in the long view, to be the indispensable condition of any peaceful, diplomatic "rollback" in Europe.

Having conceded this much, the fact remains that a negotiated European settlement is hardly around the corner. Mr. Kennan seemed to be suggesting that Europe, after the withdrawal of the Soviet and American troops, would be defended only by conventional armies, with respect to which he employed the term "milita." In point of fact he was thinking of the Swiss army, which is one of the toughest in Europe, although it is recruited according to a regional pattern. Furthermore, he seemed to be implying that the American commitment to come to the aid of Europe in the event of an aggression would remain absolute, despite the withdrawal of troops from the continent. Here, however, we come to the weak point of this otherwise attractive proposal.

When the American continent was beyond the reach of Soviet bombs, it was conceivable that the United States could protect Europe without maintaining troops there. Once atomic or thermo-nuclear equality was established, such a guarantee from afar became practically worthless. Who could believe that the United States would consent to the destruction of its own cities in order to protect West Berlin? Besides, the question is not what the United States would do in such or such a case, but how the Soviet leaders would estimate American intentions. A misunderstanding or a faulty estimate of the American commitment is excluded by the physical presence of American troops in Europe. This is the primary reason for the hostility in European governmental circles toward the "nuclear vacuum."

Even supposing that the governments and peoples of Western Europe were willing to risk such a vacuum, they would demand, in return, some likelihood of a peaceful liberation of Eastern Europe. Such a liberation would be possible only if the Kremlin, after the mutual troop withdrawal, allowed a reform of the Soviet regimes, indeed perhaps even a revolution of the Hungarian type. But the

1 *Russia, the Atom, and the West.* By George Kennan. Harpers. $2.50.

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Soviet spokesmen never tire of repeating that coexistence must be based on the political status quo. Thus we would have the following alternatives: either the negotiations leading to withdrawal would leave the political status of Europe in doubt, and in that case the ambiguity of the agreement would constitute a danger to world peace; or there would be a serious attempt to specify the political status of a reunified and militarily evacuated Europe, and there would be little chance of an accord.

Let us consider the first alternative. What would happen if, after the departure of the Russian troops, the Hungarians rose against their masters? Would the Kremlin passively absorb this defeat? What would the West do if the doctrine of the new Holy Alliance (the Russian right to intervene against counter-revolution) were applied? Make war? This would mean suicide. Would the United States then simply send its troops back to Germany? Even supposing that they could do so, the return to the status quo ante would merely mean that after the evacuation of Europe the Iron Curtain would continue, invisibly, to exist, since Soviet military operations west of the line would mean war and east of the line would not. If we are to have an Iron Curtain it would better be visible than invisible.

Let us now consider the second alternative. Prior to any military exacuation, the Russians, the Americans and the Germans would attempt to settle the political status of Germany. Why should the wider framework make agreement any easier? For the moment, Mr. Khrushchev does not envisage the desovietization of Eastern Germany. The proof of this is simply that he has not proposed the one settlement which has occurred to everyone else. In return for desovietization he could easily force a reunified Germany out of the Atlantic Pact, since no government in Bonn could refuse neutrality if it were to be followed by democratic reunification.

The simple truth is that the West wants a military status quo and Moscow wants a political one. Compromise between these two contradictory purposes is, for the moment, improbable. Mr. Kennan's suggestions offer no way out of the impasse. The proposed evacuation implies a modification of the military situation which the West would accept only if it came with the quasi-assurance that the political situation in Eastern Europe would also change. Since this assurance cannot be had, the West will not agree to evacuation; at most (and

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even this is improbable) it might envisage a reduction of armaments in a limited zone.

A crisis may arise in Europe if Mr. Khrushchev, through the Pankow government, undertakes to blockade West Berlin. This is hardly probable at the moment, although the possibility cannot be excluded. The situation is more ominous in the Middle East.

There we have an extremely violent revolutionary movement which will probably result, within a period of years, in forcing Iraq and Jordan into the so-called Unified State of Egypt and Syria. The rulers of the former two countries are attempting to defend themselves through a rival federation. But Nasser, unlike the Hashemite sovereigns, is supported by popular enthusiasm. This transformation is fraught with peril for Israel and the West. Europe will be dependent on Middle Eastern oil for another generation (unless the Sahara can be exploited on a large scale). What, one wonders, will be the attitude of Nasser's Arab State to Israel? The latter's security has been based on the superiority of its armed forces over the combined strength of its neighbors. Will this superiority last? And will the West be able to intervene if the Soviets support the Arabs?

Our concern, here, is not to speculate on the various possibilities. We have recalled the principal—and well-known—factors in the present situation in order to suggest a negative reply to the question of a Middle Eastern settlement. In Europe, a limited agreement is improbable because of the direct conflict between the Soviet insistence on the political status quo and the Western insistence on the military status quo. In the Middle East, agreement seems excluded by the revolutionary process which, although favored and partially manipulated by the Soviets, cannot be completely dominated by either side. Why should the men in the Kremlin agree to refrain from arming the "active neutralists"?

Nobody can predict the further developments of this crisis, nor the extent to which the West will succeed in safeguarding its essential interests and coming to some sort of terms with the Arab nationalists. East-West negotiations would probably be sterile.

The prospect of limited agreement is hardly any brighter in the Far East. For the moment, the policy of Peking is not aggressive. Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai are seeking to reassure their neighbors in Southeast Asia. The Americans will eventually have to recognize the

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Chinese Communist regime. But the present situation can go on without change for years. Peking can scarcely *recognize* the fact of the Nationalist regime in Formosa, and Washington cannot sacrifice the latter, nor deny its legitimacy, as long as it exists.

* * *

Is Western unity today more fragile, more threatened, than it has been in the past? Three factors—independent of each other but with cumulative effects—have given rise to the rather widespread feeling on both sides of the Atlantic that the Alliance is on the point of disintegrating: the present weakness of the Republican administration and of President Eisenhower himself, the progress of Soviet technology and military power, and the ill-disguised hostility of Washington and London towards French policy in North Africa.

How long can the Alliance hold together in the absence of effective leadership? It is difficult to say. Personally, I tend to believe that alliances between democratic countries are stronger than they seem. Their weaknesses are more visible than their factors of strength, but in the long run it is the latter that prevail. The majority of European statesmen are convinced that no alternative policy can afford as much security as the Atlantic Pact and NATO. This proposition is less obviously true in the era of ballistic weapons than in the era of American invulnerability; nevertheless, it remains true.

In Europe the Alliance can, with difficulty, arrive at a common policy with respect to the Soviet Union. Elsewhere in the world this is not the case. In the Middle East, the policies of the Western countries diverge, not so much because their interests are contradictory as because the responsible officials—whether in Washington, London, or Paris—are incapable of defining an Arab policy. Each government lives from day to day, reacting to events as best it can. London clings to the Baghdad Pact and tries to keep control over the Arab princedoms of the Arabian peninsula. Washington tries to appease Arab nationalism without sacrificing the sovereigns. This pragmatism is perhaps inevitable, but it is not conducive to coordination. In Africa, the American and British governments have too little faith in the successful outcome of French policy in Algeria to support it; nor can they oppose it without setting forth an alternative policy. Being in doubt, they practice a semi-abstention, and thus earn the semi-indignation of both sides.

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Between 1946 and 1956 the struggle of the western democracies against Stalinist Communism in Europe had a sort of ideological purity. The western intellectual knew what and whom he was combating. He could denounce the Communists and their allies with a clear conscience. As late as 1956, Khrushchev and his accomplices were presiding over the bloody suppression of the Hungarian revolution. But Communism in its post-Stalinist phase is less outwardly pathological, and it is armed with the H-Bomb. The West cannot dispense with the threat of collective suicide, and the intellectuals can neither reject nor acclaim such a strategy.

Even more equivocal are the diplomatic conflicts outside of Europe. The independent states created since the war are certainly preferable to interminable warfare in Indochina and Africa, but they no sooner exist than they cease to stir the admiration or sympathy of the western intellectual. It is all very well for the intellectual to become passionate over the "liberation" of the "colonized and oppressed" peoples, but the regimes created by these peoples are inevitably imitations of the Western (or Soviet) regimes. These improvised states should, we feel, receive Western aid. But it is hard to see why an intellectual should feel particularly committed to the adventure of a Nasser or of a Mohammed V. In other words, once the political domination of the Europeans over the Asians, the Arabs, and the Africans has been terminated—and, with the end of the Algerian war, the process will be nearing its conclusion—the new States will pose problems for the economists and the experts. Perhaps the rich white minority of Europe and America will feel isolated in a hostile world. The statesmen will have a great deal to do; the intellectuals will be hard put to find occasions for crusades.

Perhaps, in the field of world politics too, the era of ideology is coming to an end.

(Translated from the French by H. J. Kaplan)

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John Henry Raleigh

VICTORIAN MORALS AND THE MODERN NOVEL

The life of the London poor in the nineteenth century was, for the most part, miserable, and no one who has read Henry Mayhew, that great sociologist, can ever forget his grim and heartbreaking peoples and scenes. If man had set out consciously to fashion a hell for his fellow men, he could not have done better than nineteenth-century English culture did with the poor who "lived" off the streets of London. Indeed Mayhew's descriptions in *London Labour and the London Poor* sometimes convey a kind of Pandemonium quality and one can almost sniff the sulphur in the air. His description of a crowd entering a "Penny Gaff"—a kind of temporary theater which put on salacious performances—suggests some of the horror:

> Forward they came, bringing an overpowering stench with them, laughing and yelling as they pushed their way through the waiting room. One woman carrying a sickly child with a bulging forehead, was reeling drunk, the saliva running down her mouth as she stared about with a heavy fixed eye. Two boys were pushing her from side to side, while the poor infant slept, breathing heavily, as if stupified, through the din. Lads jumping on girls, and girls laughing hysterically from being tickled by the youths behind them, every one shouting and jumping, presented a mad scene of frightful enjoyment.[1]

But if anything, as over against this evil of stench and noise, the lonely pathos of individual tragedies' is even more frightful: the blind street-seller who had once been a tailor and had worked in a room seven feet square, with six other people, from five in the morning until ten at night, the room having no chimney or window or fire, though no fire was needed even in the winter, and in the summer it was like an oven. This is what it was like in the daytime, but "no mortal tongue," the man told Mayhew, could describe what it

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was like at night when the two great gaslights went on. Many times the men had to be carried out of the room fainting for air. They told the master he was killing them, and they knew he had other rooms, but to no avail. The gaslights burned into the man's eyes and into his brain until, "at last, I was seized with rheumatics in the brain, and obliged to go into St. Thomas's Hospital. I was there eleven months, and *came out stone blind*"; or the crippled street-seller of nutmeg graters, who crawled, literally, out into the streets where he stayed from ten to six eking out his pitiful existence, six days a week. On wet days he would lie in bed, often without food. "Ah," he told Mayhew, "it *is* very miserable indeed lying in a bed all day, and in a lonely room, without perhaps a person to come near one—helpless as I am—and hear the rain beat against your windows, all that with nothing to put to your lips." Thus, if in what follows, the life of the poor is shown to have some moments of joy, these are, it is remembered, only oases in an illimitable desert of misery.

And since the Victorian moral "code"—if there were such a thing—will be subjected to equally large generalizations, these too should be qualified in advance. Victorian "morality" is a very complex affair. In the first place, what we call Victorian morality is only middle-class morality. Above and below, in the relatively small aristocracy and in the immense lower class, the puritanical code did not prevail; and indeed, in many respects, the aristocrats and the poor had more in common with one another, morally speaking, than either had with the middle class. Noting the passion for card-playing, for example, that prevailed among aristocrats and commoners, Mayhew remarked, "It has been said that there is a close resemblance between many of the characteristics of a very high class, socially, and a very low class." Considering the life of the aristocracy as a whole, one cannot doubt but that life often ran high in those days, despite the decorous national examples of Victoria and Albert. Writing to Forster from Paris in 1856, Dickens relates an incident, given by a friend, of an experience with the English squirearchy. Dickens's friend, designated as "B," had, three years previously, been living near Gadshill and occupied himself with sketching in the outdoors. One day a gentleman stopped his carriage and invited "B" to come to his house and use his library. "B" accepted the invitation and stayed on at the house, as it turned out, for six months. The lady of the house, aged

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twenty-five, was the squire's mistress. (He was married but separated from his wife.) The young lady, very beautiful, was engaged in drinking herself to death, while the squire, though "utterly depraved and wicked" was "an excellent scholar, an admirable linguist, and a great theologian." There were also two other "mad" visitors who stayed six months. Tea, coffee, even water, were seldom seen in this establishment: "Breakfast: leg of mutton, champagne, beer and brandy. Lunch: shoulder of mutton, champagne, beer and brandy. Dinner: every conceivable dish (Squire's income £7,000—a year), champagne, beer and brandy." The squire's wife, in her turn, was bringing up their one daughter in vice and in linguistic depravity, in order to spite the squire. At thirteen the daughter was "coarse" in conversation and always drunk. At last the mistress died, after which the "party" broke up. The squire himself later died of a "broken heart."[2] And similar concatenations, minus the £7,000 a year and the brandy and champagne, were abundantly evident in the lower class.

As for the middle class, it is by now quite clear that the later nineteenth century and the early twentieth century had considerably overestimated the nature and extent of its prudery and of its innocence. In their private and personal lives there is considerable evidence that the Victorians were much less inhibited and conventional than we are, generally speaking, today. By this assertion I do not refer only to the obvious facts of George Eliot's liaison with Lewes, or Dickens's with Ellen Ternan, or the involved ménage of John Chapman or the *ménage à quatre* of the Thornton Hunts and the George Henry Lewes, or any of the extralegal sexual relations which any Victorian worth his or her salt seemed to get himself or herself involved with. I mean that the general *attitude* toward the private, "unsanctified" relation, while in theory it might be rigorous, often turned out to be in practice remarkably tolerant. Especially was there tolerance among the Unitarians and Radicals. Thus when Harriet Taylor, after the birth of her second child, felt depressed and uncertain, and uncongenial in her intellectual relation to her hearty, businessman husband, went to see her pastoral counselor, the Unitarian William Johnson Fox, the minister, instead of advocating fasting and prayer, determined that she should meet John Stuart Mill, an event which took place and has since become a part of recorded history.

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Coincidentally Fox, although married and a father, was the lover of Harriet's best friend, Eliza Flower. Later Mrs. Fox, finding her position difficult, made a formal complaint to Fox's congregation, and Fox had to defend himself in "open church." Mill and Harriet Taylor, whose father was a prominent Unitarian and whose influence was used, rushed to his defense—Mill believing him "innocent"—and Fox was vindicated. One wonders how successfully a minister in our enlightened and psychological age would weather a similar situation or if the elders of his church would rush to his defense if he were once accused.

Yet it is true that the middle class exercised a far-reaching and vigorous moral censorship upon its chief entertainment, fiction, although even in this area some qualifications and provisos must be made. First there were differing degrees of censorship in differing decades of the century. In the forties, for example, there was much less squeamishness than in the sixties, by which time the habit of family reading had become firmly established, and by the eighties and nineties Hardy, Moore, and others had broken the familial tyranny. Thus it was only for a relatively brief period, after mid-century, that the censorship was in full operation.[3] In the earlier decades neither *Wuthering Heights* nor *Jane Eyre,* filled as they are with an intense sexuality, roused any general furor on this score. Furthermore, even within the conventions and in any decade, the Victorian novelists usually managed to convey the intended effect. No one was in doubt as to what Becky Sharp was up to in her days on the Continent, after her fall. There is, too, in many of Dickens's novels a kind of implicit bawdiness—a jeering crowd of urchins or elders, with smirks on their faces and, one may well imagine, profanity in their mouths. Mr. Pickwick, for example, in the company of a young lady, is called by someone in the crowd an "old ram." Even in later decades, when the censorship was real and rigorous, implication could serve with great effectiveness to circumvent the code. Dorothea Brooke's marriage to Casaubon is both a spiritual and a physical tragedy. The spiritual tragedy is fully and explicitly analyzed, but the physical tragedy, while never directly commented upon by the authoress, is concretely underlined by the characters in the novel, particularly by the remarks of Celia and Mrs. Cadwallader. By them we are reminded, again and again, that the magnificent Dorothea, with her great brown eyes and her powerful maternal hands and her immense

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vitality, is giving herself to a dried-up old pedant with two white moles—with hairs in them—on his cheek, who makes unpleasant noises when eating his soup, and who has one foot in the grave, although, as Mrs. Cadwallader says, he evidently intends to pull it back.

Still, with all these provisos admitted, Victorian morality was stringent, and it exercised a stringent censorship on the novel, and, partially anyway, upon life itself. But its historical irony consists in the fact that it broke down, in the novel, if not in life, in the direction of the morality and mores of the lower class, whose conduct and attitude the middle-class Victorians found so reprehensible and whose "lapsed" and unregenerate mode of life the bourgeoisie attempted to meliorate, usually without success. Mayhew reported that the costermongers said that tracts and sermons gave them "the 'orros," and, indeed, the poor were adamant in their unregeneracy in the face of the admonitions to "purity" that were administered to them. The classic instance in Victorian fiction is the impassioned retort of the workingman to the hectoring Mrs. Pardiggle in *Bleak House*: concluding a lengthy and aggressive list of his sins, he exclaims:

How have I been conducting of myself? Why, I've been drunk for three days; and I'd a been drunk four, if I'd a had the money. Don't I never mean for to go to church? No, I don't never mean for to go to church. I shouldn't be expected there, if I did; the beadle's too genteel for me. And how did my wife get that black eye? Why, I giv' it her; and if she says I didn't, she's a Lie!

But the moral stance of the workingman, passive and helpless as he was in the context of the society of which he was more or less the creature, prevailed in a deep sense, and the revolt that occurred in English fiction in Butler and in Hardy and others, and later on preeminently in D. H. Lawrence, was in a sense an upsurge from below, an affirmation of the naturalistic and instinctive ways of life of the lower class, as against the theoretical and restrictive moral preconceptions of the middle class. And the history of the novel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is, in part, the story of how that workingman, whom Mrs. Pardiggle hectored, got up off the floor, and went, or perhaps staggered, to a writing desk, where he composed first *The Way of All Flesh* and *Jude the Obscure* and, later, such books as *The Rainbow, Women in Love,* and *The Man Who Died.*

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I

The costermongers of the streets of London were without faith or hope, but, within the necessary limits, they practiced charity. They were, Mayhew tells us, scrupulously honest among themselves, although they could seldom indulge in the luxury of being honest with strangers. "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them as tresspass agin us," said a coster to Mayhew. "It's a very good thing, in coorse, but no costers can't do it." They were nevertheless surprisingly honest with the "deserving" rich. A certain Mrs. Chisholm, Mayhew reports, had let out at different times as much as £160,000 that had been entrusted to her for helping out the "lower orders," and the whole of this large amount had been returned, *"with the exception of £12."* They had no trust in banks or similar institutions, and although they had to pay usurious rates when forced to borrow from their own kind—sometimes at the rate of twenty percent per week, or no less than £1,040 a year for every £100 advanced—still their profound and unshakable distrust of all the institutions above them rendered them impervious to the whole idea of capitalism, investments, inheritances, and so on, although, it should be added, they passed on, like true entrepreneurs, the usurer's exorbitant rates to their benighted customers.

If the costers did not partake of the idea of capitalism that animated a great section of the middle class above them, neither did they bow down to the official Victorian deities of God, Home, and Country. Their nationalism was deep-grained in the sense that they disliked and distrusted foreigners—especially the omnipresent Irish whom they called the "Greeks"—yet they were completely skeptical, and rightly so, about the ecstatic chauvinism of part of the middle class. Like Matthew Arnold, they could be moved only to derisive laughter at Mr. Roebuck's Parliamentary encomiums on the beauties of being an Englishman in the nineteenth century. The popular song that was punctuated by the refrain, "Britons never shall be slaves," the costers rendered as "Britons always shall be slaves." For the detailed social structure of their society they had equal distrust and ignorance. To be sure, Queen Victoria's granite-like moral eminence was so towering that it cast a shade even over these lower depths. Yet the costers would not be solemn about Her Majesty, and mock love letters between her and Albert were hawked in the streets. Even

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her philoprogenitiveness was not sacred. The combined respect and irony in their attitude toward the Queen can be seen in the account of the "patterers," who hawked literature in the streets. They never, they told Mayhew, had much to say about the Queen: ". . . it wouldn't go down. . . . In coorse nothing can be said against her, and nothing ought to, that's true enough." Yet one patterer, as it turned out, had hawked "news" about the Queen during her most recent confinement:

I cried her *accouchement* [pronounced as in English without knowledge of French] of *three*! Lord love you, sir, it would have been no use crying *one*; peoples so used to that; but a Bobby came up and he stops me, and said it was some impudence about the Queen's *coachman*! Why look at it, says I, fat-head—I knew I was safe. . . .

And the royal love affair seemed to have afforded them infinite amusement. One street ballad, for example, had one quatrain:

Here I am in rags
From the land of All-dirt
To marry England's Queen
And my name is Prince Albert.

Of other eminent people they were liable to have more reserved opinions. The hero of Waterloo was not much amiss, "if he lets politics alone," but the name of a bishop was for them but another name for Beelzebub. The aristocrats in general they regarded as tricksters who somehow got something for nothing, although they were completely nonplussed, literally, by the concept of living without working. As for the middle class, the patterers freely and cynically exploited its prejudices, especially the anti-Roman one. One experienced patterer told Mayhew that although they peddled anti-Papal literature during religious crises, as in the affair of Cardinal Wiseman, they had no feeling about the Pope one way or another: "*We* goes to it as at an election." His own favorite, the man said, was a ballad called "The Pope and Cardinal Wiseman" whose chorus ran thus:

Monks and Nuns and fools afloat,
We'll have no bulls shoved down our throat,
Cheer up and shout down with the Pope,
And his bishop Cardinal Wiseman.

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The over-all politics of the costermongers was simple and direct: it consisted simply in a hatred of the police; in fact, said Mayhew, the police *were* their politics. They were interested in Chartism, and they were mostly all Chartists, although they knew nothing of the six points and they could not understand why the Chartist leaders exhorted them to peace and quietness when they could just as well fight it out with the police at once. "I am assured," said Mayhew, "that in case of a political riot, every 'coster' would seize his policeman." And among themselves they did carry on a continuous civil war with the "Peelers." To "serve out" a policeman was the bravest act and the highest office to which a coster could aspire. They were implacable in this pursuit, motivated as they were by a simple revenge code, and would patiently shadow a policeman for months until, catching him at a disadvantage, they would "do him in." The ensuing jail sentence was regarded as a mere bagatelle, and well worth the status of a hero among the costers that also followed.

If the costers had no concept of nationality or law or politics, they were likewise devoid of any religious sentiment or understanding. Only among the most miserable of the street people—the lame, the halt, the blind—could Mayhew find any religious notions. The blind musicians were "a far more deserving class than is usually supposed—this affliction seems to have chastened them and to have given a peculiar religious cast to their thoughts." But among the main body of costers only three in a hundred had even been inside a church or knew what was meant by Christianity. Occasionally a sort of Hardyesque feeling about the Deity emerged, as with an old sailor who told Mayhew that while there may have "once" been a God, He was either dead or grown old and diseased, for He obviously did not "fash" [trouble] himself with his creatures at all. But the bulk of the costers lived in cheerful ignorance of the facts of Christianity—"I don't know what the Pope is. Is he in any trade?"; "O, yes, I've heard of God; he made heaven and earth; I never heard of his making the sea; that's another thing, and you can best learn of that at Billingsgate"—and, moreover, out of the churches themselves they saw issuing forth only fashionable and well-dressed people. Although they hated the Irish, they respected the Catholic Church because they actually saw the Sisters of Charity caring for the sick. Protestantism meant mostly tracts and sermons and although they

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respected some of the inferior orders of the Church of England, Mayhew was told that if they were to join any religion it would be the Catholic. But by and large they were freethinkers. The patterers hawked on the streets—and this sometimes took courage—Hone's notorious parodies of the catechism and the litany, and after Hone's trial and acquittal, he had become with them a "hero." Especially were the patterers, who were the intellectuals among the costers, skeptical and atheistical. Some of them had actually had a classical education and thus had the knowledge to back up their scoffing: "Most of them," said Mayhew, "scoffed at the Bible, or perverted its passages. . . ." The patterers possessed a high degree of sophistication generally and were, in politics, "liberal Tories" who hated the Whigs and lamented the death of Peel.

But what troubled Mayhew the most about the costers was their imperfect concept and practice of marriage and home life, which the middle class had enshrined at the apex of its system of values. Only one tenth of the couples living together were married, and none of them had any notion of "legitimate" or "illegitimate" children. They thought of the marriage ceremony as constituting a waste of time and money, and the women of illegal unions were as faithful as those of legal ones. But none of them, married or not, had strict notions about fidelity, and in hard times it was considered no crime for a woman to depart from the path of virtue in order to provide for a fire or a meal. Desertions, heavy drinking, and the accompanying brutality were, of course, frequent, but it didn't seem to matter much. As one informant told Mayhew:

> They sometimes take a little drop themselves, the women do, and get beaten by their husbands for it, and hardest beaten if the man's drunk himself. They're sometimes beaten for other things, too, or for nothing at all. But they seem to like the men better for their beating them. I never could make that out.

The whole idea of "home" was foreign to the costers. They worked in and often took their meals in the street. Leisure time was given over to the beer-shop, the dancing room, or the theater. The very word "home," according to Mayhew, was seldom used by them. The parent-child relation was likewise different from the one that prevailed in the middle class. Either it was established upon a

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non-authoritarian basis: "The costermongers are kind to their children, perhaps in a rough way, and the women make regular pets of them very often." Or, conversely, it plainly recognized and made explicit the latent hostility which is part and parcel of that delicate relation. It was very common for the father and son to quarrel by the time the boy reached adolescence, and for the boy, who knew business thoroughly by that age, to leave home and set out on his own. One of Mayhew's informants said of the coster boys, "If the father vexes him or snubs him, he'll tell his father to go to h—l, and he and his gal will start on their own account." Adolescent marriages were common; two or three out of every one hundred boys of thirteen or fourteen were either married to or living with a girl, who was usually a couple of years older.

The patterers, as might be expected, were the least legalistic and the most irregular of all the street people as concerns marriage. As they were itinerants, they often practiced polygamy, and, like the legendary sailor, had a wife in every town. Mayhew had heard of one "renowned" patterer who was married to four women and "had lived in criminal intercourse with his own sister, and his own daughter by one of his wives."

Yet this way of life—dirty and precarious and amoral—had immense attractions, the first of which was absolute freedom. There were in the streets, usually among the patterers, well-educated people from the middle class who had chosen to drop from that class into street life. Mayhew tells of two brothers, street patterers, who were "well-educated" and "respectably connected" who "candidly" confessed that they preferred that kind of life to any other and would not leave it if they could, and Mayhew remarked, somewhat ruefully, that it was an anthropological fact, always and universally true, that no one in any culture who has adopted the nomadic way of life ever abandons it, while, on the other hand, as in Indian country, the reverse is often true and the "civilized" people will often become nomads. According to Mayhew, the nomads are always characterized by twelve distinct habitual attitudes: a repugnance to regular and continuous labor; a want of providence in storing up for the future; a power for enduring privation; an immoderate love of gaming; a love of "libidinous" dances; a love of witnessing the suffering of sentient creatures; a delight in warfare and perilous sport; a desire for ven-

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geance; a looseness of notions about property; an absence of chastity among females and a general disregard for feminine virtue; and a vague sense of religion and a crude notion of the Creator.

Mayhew, of course, considered these as the stigmata of immorality, but, obviously, the costermongers were "immoral" only in a relative sense; and they had their own moral code, which was based not upon the sanctity of property and home—the basis for middle-class morality—but upon the sanctity of the instincts of the blood. Like modern psychologists, they were the enemies of "repression," and like the upper class they believed in the idea of the "duel." An article of their faith was that a fight should never be stopped, and when one broke out in the streets, a ring was formed in order to insure its continuance, "for they hold it a wrong thing to stop a battle, as it causes bad blood for life; whereas, if the lads fight it out they shake hands and forget all about it." Their social code in general was based upon personal feelings rather than legal or moral sanctions. They boasted of always sticking together, and a coster could always leave his stall, as a shopkeeper never could, unprotected, knowing that his fellow costers would keep an eye on it and see to it that nothing was stolen. Their own code was based mainly on the idea of personal bravery. This code dictated, for example, that pain should be borne in silence and with pluck. They were all pugilists, and a good one was a local hero. All the pubs had gloves at hand, and fifteen-minute bouts were the order of the day. Their sports were generally dangerous, requiring both courage and dexterity. "They prefer," said Mayhew, "if crossing a bridge, to climb over the parapet, and walk along on the stone coping."

Above all there was no place in the code for the middle-class idea of "respectability." Indeed the more intelligent of the patterers mocked at the whole concept. And the impudence and wit that Dickens put at the disposal of the "Artful Dodger," especially in the trial scene when he directly confronts the forces of law and order, were evidently commonplace among the costers. Although most of them were completely uneducated—only one in ten was able to read—they were preternaturally acute, for only by their wits could they exist. One of the quickest-witted of the patterers was interviewed by Mayhew and recounted an experience that paralleled, with a happier ending, that of the Artful Dodger:

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I was once before Alderman Kelley, when he was Lord Mayor, charged with obstructing, or some humbug. "What are you my man," he says quietly, and like a gentleman. "In the same line as yourself, my lord," says I. "How's that?" says he. "I'm a paper-worker for my living, my lord," says I. I was soon discharged and there was such fun and laughing, that if I'd a few slums in my pocket, I believe I could have sold them all in the justice-room.

And the great heavy Victorian morality overhead, which at its best produced such titans as John Stuart Mill, George Eliot, and Matthew Arnold, but which also produced, in lesser vessels, Theobald and Christina Pontifex, finally toppled over in the direction of lower-class morality, and *The Way of All Flesh* celebrates a way of life not far different from the life of the costers.

II

It hardly needs to be pointed out that Butler's attack upon official Victorian morality jibes, almost point by point, with the actual morality of the lower orders: freedom, or neglect, for children, an early exodus from the parental domain, no tie to formal religion or formal education, impudence, in general, about the sacred cows of the middle class, a wholesale rejection of the idea of "respectability," an over-all anarchism, and a belief in the instincts. Add a private income, some book learning, some notions—none too formal or precise—about a Deity, and subtract the love of brutality and the terrible suffering that often prevailed, and a street patterer would come close to being a Butlerian hero. It is no accident that Butler has his hero shed his last illusions about the middle-class outlook among the London poor (whom he is supposedly "converting" but who in actuality convert him) and that after his ultimate "fall"—the period spent in jail—he should, like a street patterer, have dropped out of his own class and joined the lower one. But the heart of the matter goes deeper than explicit ideas and institutions. What Butler was attacking, above all, was middle-class consciousness, that is, the way the middle-class mind operated, and he opposed this consciousness with another type or way of handling experience, which he associated with either the aristocracy or the lower class, for it was only these that had the famous Butlerian "grace," the ability to act by instinct and by the unconscious. Towneley, upper-class, and Mr.

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Shaw, the tinker of the lower-class, both have this faculty because they have not been brought up in what was for Butler the prison-house of abstract moral codes and formulations and surrounded by all kinds of taboos and bugaboos which attempted anyway to repress instinct completely and to regulate all human conduct—even human thought—by acquired precepts. Butler thought that St. Paul was the real villain in Western history, for he represented formulated law.

If Butler embodies the comedy of this revolt against middle-class consciousness, Hardy embodies in his career as a whole, first, its antitype as pastoral and, second and finally, its antitype as tragedy. The world of *Far from the Madding Crowd* or *The Woodlanders* is the idyll from which, with some exceptions, the bugaboo of consciousness is absent, and where time has stopped and nature is benignly soft. There was a Hardy "mood," which all his admirers loved and which has no parallel in English literature. D. H. Lawrence, perhaps the best and most perceptive critic of Hardy, summed it up in a letter written in 1918 from a cottage in Berkshire: "It is very nice here—Hardy country—like *Woodlanders*—all woods and hazel copses, and tiny little villages, under the church, with fields slanting down, and a hazel copse almost touching the little garden wall. . . ."[4] Hardy himself described Little Hintock, the locale of *The Woodlanders,* as "one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world where may usually be found more meditation than action, and more passivity than meditation; where reasoning proceeds on narrow premises, and results in inferences wildly imaginative." Marty South and Giles Winterbourne, the real if not the titular hero and heroine, are Arcadian primitives, taciturn, in tune with the natural world—whose symbols they can decipher like hieroglyphs—instinctive, and personal: "Her [Marty's] face had the usual fullness of expression which is developed by the life of solitude. Where the eyes of the multitude beat like waves upon a countenance they seem to wear away individuality." Despite their mutual tragedy and Giles's death, they are outside the hell of consciousness. But as Hardy's career went on, the rustics got, in Henry James's phrase, squeezed into their "horrid age," with its formulations and conceptualized taboos. Tess is described as being surrounded by a host of "moral hobgoblins," false and contrary to her instincts, that harass her waking life and hound her to her death. Lawrence said that in Hardy none of the central characters

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ever really care about position or money or even immediate self-preservation. They are all struggling for that most passionate and most unself-conscious of relationships—love. They thus "explode out of convention"[5] and are destroyed, while those who remain safely and pallidly within the pale are saved. Critics of Hardy complained that his characters were always behaving in unexpected fashion and doing unexpected things, but that was just the point, according to Lawrence: they were acting instinctively in a world where the instinctive was no longer allowable. In Hardy, as in Butler, the burden of consciousness and the legacy of St. Paul have become intolerable, and in Jude's terrible death and in Ernest Pontifex's final isolation, we see two prophecies as to its ultimate end-point: either it will drive people to their death or it will drive them into outlawry, however polite and genteel, as was Ernest's.

But Hardy and Butler, while in some respects they point in the same direction, are in other respects radically divergent. Butler quite clearly looks forward to E. M. Forster and D. H. Lawrence, with their instinctive ethic, their dynamic, purposive concepts of life, their disdain for and lack of concern with the minutiae of individual consciousness, and their sense of comedy. Hardy, on the other hand, while he has deep affinities with Lawrence, especially as the poet of nature and the apostle of the instincts, looks toward the stasis and tragedy, the entrapment of the individual in the hell of his consciousness, that is the province of the later James, of Conrad, of Woolf, of Joyce. The one tradition looks forward to *The Man Who Died;* the other to *Finnegans Wake*. Thus Lawrence and Joyce, the two indisputably great English novelists of the twentieth century, in whose "wake" the novel still wallows, are not so much the unique children of the twentieth century as they are the grandchildren of the nineteenth, the twin inheritors and summarizers of the great Victorian novel, which broke, split, and diverged in two directions in the late nineteenth century.

It all began with George Eliot; at least this is what D. H. Lawrence thought. As young readers, he and "E.T." were both wholehearted admirers of George Eliot, especially of *The Mill on the Floss*. Yet Lawrence has some reservations as to the direction, namely, the psychological, to which George Eliot's novels first pointed. "You see, it was really George Eliot who started it all," Lawrence was saying

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in that deliberate way he had of speaking when he was trying to work something out in his own mind. "And how wild they were with her for doing it. It was she who started putting all the action inside. Before, you know, with Fielding and the others, it had been outside. Now I wonder which is right?"[6] "E.T." promptly replied that of course George Eliot was right, but Lawrence demurred, if ever so slightly, "You know I can't help thinking there ought to be a bit of both."[7] For he faintly suspected then what he was to assert so vehemently later, namely, that the exploration of the minutiae of consciousness was finally, magnificent a subject though it might be, a cul-de-sac, as it has since proved to be. This is what he meant by his later and more famous statement that he was no longer interested in individuals and what he meant when he emitted one of his characteristic screeches at most modern novels: "They're all little Jesuses in their own eyes, and their 'purpose' is to prove it. Oh Lord! *Lord Jim! Sylvestre Bonnard! If Winter Comes! Main Street! Ulysses! Pan!* They are all pathetic or sympathetic or antipathetic little Jesuses *accomplis* or *manqués*."[8] It is a rebellion against the intolerable "I," "I," "I," which is the signature of so many twentieth-century novels.

This subjective line that began with George Eliot and led to Henry James, to Conrad, to Virginia Woolf, to culminate in Joyce has certain marked characteristics both in content and form. Its content is the data of middle-class consciousness, usually described directly by the so-called stream of consciousness, or a variant thereof, with the exception of Conrad where narration is objection. Life is conceived of as statis—nothing can change and nothing can really happen—and, with the exception of Joyce, tragic. But even in Joyce the major assumption is that we all are trapped in our own solitary cells, endlessly chewing the cud of moment-by-moment experience, slowly and sadly in James, abruptly and ironically in Conrad, poetically and wistfully in Virginia Woolf, rapidly and humorously in Joyce. The stasis, or entrapment, tragic in James and Conrad and Hardy, becomes wistful in Woolf and funny in Joyce. *Ulysses* leaves its hero in a perfect equilibrium—nothing ventured, nothing gained. When Leopold Bloom finally kisses the adulterous rump of which he is the adorer and falls off to sleep, dreaming of Sinbad the Sailor, he is certainly one of the most equanimous protagonists in all fiction, simply because he has accepted utterly the fact that life is what it

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is and nothing can be done. But the basic attitude of this genre is deeply pessimistic. Space is imprisonment, time a tyranny, and history a nightmare from which nobody can awake. The temporal is an obsession dominating all phases of life. Similarly the tone is non-didactic and seeks merely to describe, with no moral or lesson or thesis. Once more Joyce is the culmination and fullest expression of the genre, and *Ulysses* is the most scrupulously non-kinetic of novels. It moves to nothing but sheer contemplation, which was the author's primary and sole objective.

There are also formal resemblances in the Joyce tradition that set it off from the Butler-Forster-Lawrence line. Primarily the tradition is self-consciously "literary," both in structure and style. James, Conrad, Virginia Woolf, Joyce, whatever their great differences, were all united in a devotion to the carefully planned structure, from James's "point of view," through the looping narrative of Conrad and the artfully planned one of Virginia Woolf, to the gigantic battleship, with everything in place from the underwater bolts to the railing on the conning tower, of *Ulysses*. Likewise these authors were all magicians of "the word," not only the right words, but the right words in the right order. For each, language *per se* was a kind of daemon, almost an objective entity—a lovely goddess appearing to the breathless aging bachelor Henry James on a New Year's Eve, a divine instrument to Joyce for transforming that reality behind which existed a God in whom he still believed but could no longer serve.

None of these writers was connected to one another by any conscious lines of influence, with the exception of Virginia Woolf's recognizing the importance of *Ulysses* for the method and purpose of her own work. James was "The Master," *sui generis*; Conrad a foreigner working in a strange tongue; Virginia Woolf all alone in her room with a view; Joyce an Irishman living on the Continent and consciously disdainful of all that had preceded him in English fiction. Thus each thought of himself or herself as a new start, novelistically speaking. Seen in retrospect, they all prove to be culminative and evolutionary, but this evolution resulted from the workings of the *Zeitgeist* and not from the workings of their own minds, each of which saw itself as unique, precarious, and isolated.

The Butler-Forster-Lawrence tradition explicitly reverses all of these characteristics. In the first place it is quite consciously inter-

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dependent. Both Forster and Lawrence were admirers of Butler and his intellectual unconventionality. Forster once contemplated a book on Butler, and his own novels are filled with Butlerian echoes and attitudes. *The Longest Journey* is a repetition of the Butlerian thesis that the intellect is not supreme and that only common sense and instinct can make existence bearable, indeed liveable. Lawrence and Forster, of course, knew each other, and although Lawrence, as was his custom, was sparing in his praise of Forster's work, the tie between the two writers is manifest. Forster's admiration for Lawrence's work and his recognition of Lawrence's genius are specifically documented in *Aspects of the Novel,* where Lawrence is called the one indisputable "prophet" among modern writers. And the "natural man" who figures in Forster's early work, either an Italian like Gino or an Englishman like Stephen Wonham, anticipate Lawrence's "dark gamekeeper."

The Butler-Forster-Lawrence tradition likewise has its own form and content. Formally, it prides itself on being non-literary, without involved manipulation of structure or scrupulously maintained "points of view" and without agonies over the *mot juste*. Forster thought that the sanctity of the device of the point of view, made into a holy of holies by James and Percy Lubbock, was an artificial shibboleth and very consciously in his own novels he violated it. Lawrence's disdain for the artifices of art was notorious. Whereas Joyce's method of rewriting was to complicate and complicate further, ever adding to a formal and precise structure, Lawrence's was to throw away the existing document and rewrite the original idea all over again.

In matters of content the Lawrencian tradition is equally divergent from the Joyce tradition. Stasis is replaced by dynamics, tragedy by comedy, and pessimism by hope. Space becomes freedom, time becomes growth, and history can be shed as the snake sheds its skin. Thus against the ending of *Ulysses* and its static entrapment, with Mr. Bloom accepting this entrapment, one can contrast the ending of *The Rainbow* where amid the thunder of the dark horses on the ground and under the splendor of the great rainbow in the sky, Ursula Brangwen sheds her own past and, by proxy, the past of her fellow human beings. This is a world which is organic and purposive; it is expressive of the anti-Darwinian argument that Butler had initiated, and Shaw had furthered. Studying botany Ursula rejects, solely

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on the basis of her own intuition, the mechanistic "purpose-less-ness" explanation of natural phenomenon that her professors give her, for she believes, against all reason and science, that everything has a "soul," even objects of nature, such as flowers. In her mind everything in the universe is potentially living and eternal, and time itself is no longer tyrannous. The earthly institution that most fully symbolized the victory over time of this Butlerian or Lamarckian universe was the medieval cathedral. Lincoln Cathedral in *The Rainbow* is described as:

> Away from time, always outside of time! Between east and west, between dawn and sunset, the Church lay like a seed in silence, dark before germination, silenced after death . . . potential with all the noise and transition of life, the cathedral remained hushed, a great involved seed. . . . Spanned round with the rainbow, the jewelled gloom folded music upon silence, light upon darkness, fecundity upon death. . . .

Other institutions, such as the great country house of Breadalby, that symbolize the dead and finished past but that still, anomalously, survive in the present are described as snares and delusions: "What a snare and a delusion, this beauty of static things."

Finally the Lawrencian tradition is avowedly, one might say frantically, kinetic; it has a "message," and the burden of this message, from Butler to Lawrence, is that the middle-class consciousness has become thin and neurotic, divorced from primal needs and instincts. According to Lawrence the middle class is "broad and shallow and passionless. Quite passionless. At best they substitute affection, which is the great middle-class positive emotion."[9] A corollary of this distaste for middle-class consciousness, which had been developed by a restrictive and absolutistic morality, was a distaste for all absolutes. Everything in the world is relative to everything else, and nothing had any value except insofar as it is related to the instincts—Butler's "grace" and Lawrence's "dark power."

What Lawrence represents, then, is the culmination in the novel of that upsurge from below which the "ethic" of the London proletariat had prefigured and which Butler had first embodied in the novel. Without getting into the argument between T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis about the "cultural resources" of Lawrence, it can certainly be said that he was, definitively and defiantly, of the lower

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class rather than of the middle class. There can be no doubt that if the bawdy, bearded, dying Lawrence of the later years were to rewrite *Sons and Lovers,* the scale of values would have been considerably altered, if not actually reversed, with the drunken, vulgarian, dominated father emerging as superior to the prim, powerfully-willed mother, and Paul becoming explicitly the priggish soulmongerer, the "little Jesus," that he implicitly is in the novel itself. By the time he hit upon his true province, the world of *Women in Love* and *The Rainbow,* Lawrence had come to realize this himself. Completely unsatisfied with Skrebensky, the pre-eminent incarnation of the middle-class consciousness, Ursula Brangwen imagines that there must be another kind of consciousness, analogous to that of the workingman: "It doesn't matter. But a sort of strong understanding, in some men, and then a dignity, a directness, something unquestioned that there is in working men, and then a jolly, reckless passionateness that you see—a man who could really let go—. . ."

III

Joyce, then, represents the novel of middle-class consciousness in culmination and *in extremis,* and Lawrence represents the counter-attack from below. The question remains: where does the novel go from here? For certainly it has remained substantially in the doldrums since the deaths of Lawrence and Joyce. Good second-rank practitioners are of course abundant, but major talents, such as came in profusion from the 1830's to the 1920's, are indubitably lacking.

It is possible, of course, that the big novel is a thing of the past, a child of the special conditions of the nineteenth century. Even the writers whom one would tend to regard as the products of twentieth century, if only for chronological reasons, such as Proust, Mann, and Joyce, tend to look more and more, what with their preoccupation with ideas, their minute psychologizing, their grandiose architecture, like legacies of the nineteenth century and culminators of its particular ethos rather than new starts for the twentieth-century outlook, of which the early Hemmingway is probably more representative. *The Sun Also Rises* is a functional twentieth-century house, while *Ulysses* or *Remembrance of Things Past* are Victorian mansions.

On the other hand, there is no reason *per se* for assuming that the novel is doomed. The very special conditions upon which the

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epic depended and which made its existence impossible once they disappeared have no real analogy in the history of the novel. Furthermore there have been in the past, in the history of the English novel, periods of stagnation, as, for example, in the late eighteenth century, before Scott and Austen, and in the early nineteenth century, before Dickens and the great Victorians. It is possible for two such giants as Lawrence and Joyce to exhaust momentarily the possibilities of a medium, for between them both they seem to say everything that can be said. Like Scott and Austen, a century before, they seem to have divided all human experience, and then, each in his own province, to have done everything that could be done. All of the Victorians were brought up on Sir Walter, and each thought in his youth that there was to be no "competing" with *this*. But compete with him they did, and in many cases surpassed him.

Just so, Lawrence and Joyce now look overpowering, and partly because of the antithetical nature of their talents: to abjure one is to compete with the other. Joyce is the great "artificer," Lawrence the great "natural"; Joyce celebrates the mystery of fatherhood and represents the male principle, while Lawrence is the voice of womanhood and her mysteries; Joyce describes the intricacies of the city, while Lawrence is the rhapsodist of nature; Joyce examines the illogicalities of conscious and unconscious life, Lawrence the wordless ways of the instincts; Joyce is the voice of Catholicism, Lawrence of Protestantism; Joyce is the cosmopolite, Lawrence the provincial; Joyce stands for history, Lawrence for futurity; Joyce is a Rabelaisian comedian, Lawrence a Puritan prophet; Joyce apotheosizes the family, Lawrence romantic love; Joyce describes, Lawrence evokes; for Joyce sex is of the devil, for Lawrence it is a religion; Joyce portrays the pathos of frustration, Lawrence prophecies an imagined release and fulfillment; Joyce thought language an ultimate reality, Lawrence thought it an ultimate sham. Psychologically, culturally, artistically, they are antithetical in every respect, and they stand like great roadblocks whose existence seems to imperil any fresh starts.

But they are roadblocks of a differing order, Joyce a real one, Lawrence only an apparent one. *Finnegan* is a literal "wake" for a certain kind of novel, but *The Man Who Died* is an allegory pointing to a prose fiction of the future. Joyce's work carries the exploration of the psyche, literary elaboration, the sense of human frustration, and

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linguistic experimentation as far as they can be carried, and *Finnegans Wake* is the point of no return. But Lawrence, for all his resemblances and indebtednesses to Butler and Forster, represents a fresh start, or, better, a renewal.

Sociologically, he is a rebel against the individualism and the inhibitions of the middle class; artistically, he is the apostle of "naturalness," as opposed to "artifice"; psychologically, he is interested in instincts rather than the data of consciousness; ontologically, he stands for the idea of growth as against the idea of stasis; and, above all, he is perhaps the most striking representative of that late nineteenth and early twentieth century phenomenon: the re-entry of the Bible into the main stream of European culture from which it had been excluded during most of the eighteenth century and most of the nineteenth century. All over the late nineteenth century, the Bible, supposedly permanently crippled by mid-nineteenth century science and rationalism, begins to reappear, as vigorous as ever. The major impulse behind Dostoevski, as he himself said, was the Book of Job; for Tolstoi it was the New Testament; for Matthew Arnold the Bible as a whole; for Thomas Hardy the pessimistic parts of the Old Testament. Old Testament pessimism was likewise stamped into Melville's consciousness, and lies at the heart of *Moby Dick*.

Lawrence's interest in the Bible, however, and its force in his novels, lay in a different realm from any of these others, all of whom went to the Bible for philosophical or moral sustenance. In the first place, Lawrence did not like the climax of the Bible—the ending of the Four Gospels—and his last creative act was to rewrite Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in *The Man Who Died*. The Bible that he loved was contained in the early books of the Old Testament, in Genesis, Exodus, Samuel, and Kings. Furthermore, it was not the didacticism of the Bible that attracted him, and he always insisted that, despite the fact that he was a "prophet," his own novels were non-didactic and simply represented life as fully and as deeply as possible.

Rather it was the *spirit* of the earlier parts of the Old Testament that attracted him and which he tried to inject into his own novels—the vigor, the fierceness, the elemental passions, and the closeness to the earth, from which the first Father and Mother had arisen in the opening chapters of Genesis. If any part of Christianity genuinely at-

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tracted him it was the militant aspect of Protestantism. In "Hymns in a Man's Life" he said that even deeper woven into his consciousness than such early literary influences as Wordsworth or Shakespeare or Keats were the banal Nonconformist hymns that dominated his childhood memories. He was proud of the fact that he was a Congregationalist, the oldest of the Nonconformist sects, because, in his childhood anyway, it had escaped the ghastly sentimentalism that had come in with Methodism and because it was vigorous and joyful.

So too it was the rapturously and rigorously physical depiction of life in the early parts of the Old Testament that fired his imagination and animated his novels, both in their content and in their style. The incantatory prose of Lawrence, at its best and at its worst, is purely Biblical, and a page of it could be put side by side with, say, "The Song of Solomon," and there would be no essential differences: there is the concreteness of everything, the short, rapt, bardic utterance, and the oracular repetitiousness. Characters likewise have their whole instinctual life motivated by Biblical imagery and utterance, particularly, generation by generation, in *The Rainbow-Women in Love* series. When Lydia and Tom Brangwen after two years of rather tense married life, finally come together in a deep sense, Lawrence describes it thus: "When at last they had joined hands, the house was finished, and the Lord took up his abode. And they were glad." And Anna, Lydia's daughter by her first marriage, at last feels confident in her parents: "She played between the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud in confidence, having the assurance on her right hand and the assurance on her left. She was no longer called upon to uphold with her childish might the broken end of the arch. Her father and her mother now met to the span of the heavens, and she, the child, was free to play in the space beneath, between." With Anna herself, as she grows up, the Biblical sense and utterance become more pronounced, and, at times, embarrassing. When pregnant, after her marriage to Will, she takes off her clothes and dances, for, "She liked the story of David, who danced before the Lord, and uncovered himself exultingly." With Ursula, their child, the Biblical sense becomes even more emphatic. Although she hates sermons, she loves Sundays; by day she sees in a vision the white-robed spirit of Christ passing between the olive trees and by night she hears a voice calling "Samuel, Samuel!" Her favorite book is Genesis and her fa-

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vorite text, which motivates her whole life, is Genesis VI, 2-4, which begins: "The Sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair: and they took them wives of all which they chose." This passage stirs her like a call. There must be, she thinks, offspring of God, Sons of God, other than Jesus and Adam, men who had neither given up the life of the body nor been driven ignominiously from Paradise, and who "came on free feet to the daughters of men, and took them to wife, so that the women conceived and brought forth men of renown." Her whole instinctual life then is centered on finding for a mate a "Son of God." When she first sees Skrebensky, she imagines him as "one such as those Sons of God who saw the daughters of men, that they were fair"; she soon sees that he is Adamic and fallen. But in the sequel to *The Rainbow,* in *Women in Love,* Ursula finally finds, after much turmoil and struggle, her "Son of God" in Birkin. After they finally capitulate to one another, she thinks: "This was release at last. She had had lovers, she had known passion. But this was neither love nor passion. It was the daughters of men coming back to the sons of God, the strange inhuman sons of God who are in the beginning."

For the Bible, said Lawrence, was "in my bones."[10] He thought it was "a great confused novel" and that the novel itself was "the book of life." The Bible was not about God, but about "man alive." "Adam, Eve, Sarai, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Samuel, David, Bathsheba, Ruth, Esther, Solomon, Job, Isaiah, Jesus, Mark, Judas, Paul, Peter: what is it but man alive, from start to finish."[11]

The "man alive" that Mayhew, with disapproval, and Butler, with approval, saw in the upper and lower classes and that Lawrence saw in his own lower class had already been prefigured in the opening pages of the earliest and greatest of Western "novels," the Bible.

IV

The saturation in the Bible, the feeling for the natural world, the passionate surge of impulse from the "lower orders" up into the world of educated-intellectualized consciousness, the opposition of "life" to "literature"—"storytelling" to "artifice," "speech" to "style" —the anarchist-instinctual rebellion against codes and restrictions and rationality and rules are obviously not unique with Lawrence. One or more or all of these characteristics calls up memories of Langland,

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Bunyan, Blake, Wordsworth, George Orwell—the whole anarchist tradition in English literature, a tradition that accounts for much of the strength of the greatest of the Western literatures which, because of this tradition, is forever renewing itself in the Bible, in the instinctual life and in the plangent organisms of its native soil. This is not to say that the anarchist tradition constitutes the primary strength of English literature; on the contrary, it is the Chaucers, Shakespeares, and Miltons who are its towering geniuses. But considered as historical forces, as influences, the supreme writers are positively baneful. Shakespeare helped to ruin the English verse drama just as surely as Milton helped to kill off the English verse epic, and just as surely did Joyce finish off the "psychological" and "literary" novel. There is no emulation of a genius and, historically, he serves only to create a moribund tradition.

On the other hand, the immense creative powers and accomplishments of the anarchist tradition must not be underestimated either. Its two most fierce and greatest representatives are Blake and Lawrence, and they must be accounted in the first rank of English poets and novelists. But good or bad, the anarchists are always movers and shakers, who constantly renew and revitalize literature and open doors to the future. And their existence is a constant reminder that every Milton needs his Bunyan, every Pope his Blake and Wordsworth, every Joyce his Lawrence.

1 Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London, 1861), I, 43.
2 *The Letters of Charles Dickens* [Bloomsbury, 1939], II, 767.
3 See Kathleen Tillotson's excellent *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 54-58.
4 D. H. Lawrence, *The Letters of . . .*, ed. by Aldous Huxley (New York, 1932), p. 441.
5 D. H. Lawrence, *Phoenix* (New York, 1936), p. 410.
6 "E.T." *D. H. Lawrence* (London, 1935), p. 105.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 105.
8 *The Later D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by W. Y. Tindall (New York, 1952), p. 192.
9 D. H. Lawrence, *Selected Literary Criticism* (New York, 1956), p. 5.
10 *Ibid.*, p. 164.
11 *Ibid.*, p. 105.

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Ivan Turgenev

APROPOS OF "FATHERS AND SONS"

I was sea-bathing at Ventnor, a small town on the Isle of Wight—it was in August, 1860—when the first idea occurred to me of *Fathers and Sons,* the novel which deprived me, forever I believe, of the good opinion of the Russian younger generation. I have heard it said and read it in critical articles not once but many times that in my works I always "started with an idea" or "developed an idea." Some people praised me for it, others, on the contrary, censured me; for my part, I must confess that I never attempted to "create a character" unless I had for my departing point not an idea but a living person to whom the appropriate elements were later on gradually attached and added. Not possessing a great amount of free inventive powers, I always felt the need of some firm ground on which I could plant my feet. The same thing happened with *Fathers and Sons*; as the basis of its chief character, Bazarov, lay the personality of a young provincial doctor I had been greatly struck by. (He died shortly before 1860.) In that remarkable man I could watch the embodiment of that principle which had scarcely come to life but was just beginning to stir at the time, the principle which later received the name of nihilism. Though very powerful, the impression that man left on me was still rather vague. At first I could not quite make him out myself, and I kept observing and listening intently to everything around me, as though wishing to check the truth of my own impressions. I was worried by the following fact: not in one work of our literature did I ever find as much as a hint at what I seemed to see everywhere; I could not help wondering whether I was not chasing after a phantom. On the Isle of Wight, I remember, there lived

* From *Turgenev's Literary Reminiscences* to be published shortly by Farrar, Straus & Cudahy.

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with me at the time a Russian who was endowed with excellent taste and a remarkable "nose" for everything which the late Apollon Grigoryev called "the ideas" of an epoch. I told him what I was thinking of and what interested me so much and was astonished to hear the following remark: "Haven't you created such a character already in—Rudin?" I said nothing. Rudin and Bazarov—one and the same character!

Those words produced such an effect on me that for several weeks I tried not to think of the work I had in mind. However, on my return to Paris, I sat down to it again—the *plot* gradually matured in my head; in the course of the winter I wrote the first chapters, but I finished the novel in Russia, on my estate, in July [1861]. In the autumn I read it to a few friends, revised something, added something, and in March, 1862, *Fathers and Sons* was published in *The Russian Herald*.

I shall not enlarge on the impression this novel has created. I shall merely say that when I returned to Petersburg, on the very day of the notorious fires in the Apraksin Palace, the word "nihilist" had been caught up by thousands of people, and the first exclamation that escaped from the lips of the first acquaintance I met on Nevsky Avenue was: "Look, what *your* nihilists are doing! They are setting Petersburg on fire!" My impressions at that time, though different in kind, were equally painful. I became conscious of a coldness bordering on indignation among many friends whose ideas I shared; I received congratulations, and almost kisses, from people belonging to a camp I loathed, from enemies. It embarrassed and—grieved me. But my conscience was clear; I knew very well that my attitude towards the character I had created was honest and that far from being prejudiced against him, I even sympathized with him. I have too great a respect for the vocation of an artist, a writer, to act against my conscience in such a matter. The word "respect" is hardly the right one here; I simply could not, and knew not how to, work otherwise; and, after all, there was no reason why I should do that. My critics described my novel as a "lampoon" and spoke of my "exasperated" and "wounded" vanity; but why should I write a lampoon on Dobrolyubov, whom I had hardly met, but whom I thought highly of as a man and as a talented writer? However little I might think of my own talent as a writer, I always have been, and still am,

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of the opinion that the writing of a lampoon, a "squib," is unworthy of it. . . .

The critics, generally speaking, have not got quite the right idea of what is taking place in the mind of an author or of what exactly his joys and sorrows, his aims, successess and failures are. They do not, for instance, even suspect the pleasure which Gogol mentions and which consists of castigating oneself and one's faults in the imaginary characters one depicts; they are quite sure that all an author does is to "develop his ideas"; they refuse to believe that to reproduce truth and the reality of life correctly and powerfully is the greatest happiness for an author, even if this truth does not coincide with his own sympathies. Let me illustrate my meaning by a small example. I am an inveterate and incorrigible Westerner. I have never concealed it and I am not concealing it now. And yet in spite of that it has given me great pleasure to show up in the person of Panshin (in *A Nobleman's Home*) all the common and vulgar sides of the Westerners; I made the Slavophil Lavretsky "crush him utterly." Why did I do it, I who consider the Slavophil doctrine false and futile? Because *in the given case life, according to my ideas, happened to be like that,* and what I wanted above all was to be sincere and truthful. In depicting Bazarov's personality, I excluded everything artistic from the range of his sympathies, I made him express himself in harsh and unceremonious tones, not out of an absurd desire to insult the younger generation (!!!), but simply as a result of my observations of my acquaintance, Dr. D., and people like him. "Life happened to be *like that*," my experience told me once more, perhaps mistakenly, but, I repeat, not dishonestly. There was no need for me to be too clever about it; I just had to depict his character *like that*. My personal predilections had nothing to do with it. But I expect many of my readers will be surprised if I tell them that with the exception of Bazarov's views on art, I share almost all his convictions. And I am assured that I am on the side of the "Fathers" —I, who in the person of Pavel Kirsanov have even "sinned" against artistic truth and gone too far, to the point of caricaturing his faults and making him look ridiculous!

The cause of all the misunderstandings, the whole, so to speak "trouble," arose from the fact that the Bazarov type created by me has not yet had time to go through the gradual phases through which

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literary types usually go. Unlike Onegin and Pechorin, he had not been through a period of idealization and sympathetic, starry-eyed adoration. At the very moment the *new* man—Bazarov—appeared, the author took up a critical, objective attitude towards him. That confused many people and—who knows?—that was, if not a mistake, an injustice. The Bazarov type had at least as much right to be idealized as the literary types that preceded it. I have just said that the author's attitude towards the character he had created confused the reader: the reader always feels ill at ease, he is easily bewildered and even aggrieved if an author treats his imaginary character like a living person, that is to say, if he sees and displays his good as well as his bad sides, and, above all, if he does not show unmistakable signs of sympathy or antipathy with his own child. The reader feels like getting angry: he is asked not to follow a well-beaten path, but to pave his own path. "Why should I take the trouble?" he can't help thinking. "Books exist for entertainment and not for racking one's brains. And, besides, would it have been too much to ask the author to tell me what to think of such and such a character or what he thinks of him himself?" But it is even worse if the author's attitude towards that character is itself rather vague and undefined, if the author himself does not know whether or not he loves the character he has created (as it happened to me in my attitude towards Bazarov, for "the involuntary attraction" I mentioned in my diary is not love). The reader is ready to ascribe to the author all sorts of non-existent sympathies or antipathies, provided he can escape from the feeling of unpleasant "vagueness."

"Neither fathers nor sons," said a witty lady to me after reading my book, "that should be the real title of your novel and—you are yourself a nihilist." A similar view was expressed with even greater force on the publication of *Smoke*. I am afraid I do not feel like raising objections: perhaps, that lady was right. In the business of fiction writing everyone (I am judging by myself) does what he can and not what he wants, and—as much as he can. I suppose that a work of fiction has to be judged *en gros* and while insisting on conscientiousness on the part of the author, the other *sides* of his activity must be regarded, I would not say, with indifference, but with calmness. And, much as I should like to please my critics, I cannot plead guilty to any absence of conscientiousness on my part.

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I have a very curious collection of letters and other documents in connection with *Fathers and Sons*. It is rather interesting to compare them. While some of my correspondents accuse me of insulting the younger generation, of being behind the times and a reactionary, and inform me that they "are burning my photographs with a contemptuous laugh," others, on the contrary, reproach me with pandering to the same younger generation. "You are crawling at the feet of Bazarov!" one correspondent exclaims. "You are just pretending to condemn him; in effect, you are fawning upon him and waiting as a favour for one casual smile from him!" One critic, I remember, addressing me directly in strong and eloquent words, depicted Mr. Katkov and me as two conspirators who in the peaceful atmosphere of my secluded study, are hatching our despicable plot, our libellous attack, against the young Russian forces. . . . It made an effective picture! Actually, that is how this *plot* came about. When Mr. Katkov received my manuscript of *Fathers and Sons*, of whose contents he had not even a rough idea, he was utterly bewildered. The Bazarov type seemed to him "almost an apotheosis of *The Contemporary Review*," and I should not have been surprised if he had refused to publish my novel in his journal. "*Et voilà comme on écrit l'histoire!*" one could have exclaimed, but—is it permissible to give such a high-sounding name to such small matters?

On the other hand, I quite understand the reasons for the anger aroused by my book among the members of a certain party. They are not entirely groundless and I accept—without false humility—part of the reproaches levelled against me. The word "nihilist" I had used in my novel was taken advantage of by a great many people who were only waiting for an excuse, a pretext, to put a stop to the movement which had taken possession of Russian society. But I never used that word as a pejorative term or with any offensive aim, but as an exact and appropriate expression of a fact, an historic fact, that had made its appearance among us; it was transformed into a means of denunciation, unhesitating condemnation and almost a brand of infamy. Certain unfortunate events that occurred at that time increased the suspicions that were just beginning to arise and seemed to confirm the widespread misgivings and justified the worries and efforts of the "saviors of our motherland," for in Russia such "saviors of the motherland" had made their appearance just then.

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The tide of public opinion, which is still so indeterminate in our country, turned back. . . . But a shadow fell over my name. I do not deceive myself; I know that that shadow will not disappear. But why did not others—people before whom I feel so deeply my own insignificance—utter the great words: *Perissent nos noms, pourvu que la chose publique soit sauvée* . . . i.e. may our names perish so long as the general cause is saved! Following them, I too can console myself with the thought that my book has been of some benefit. This thought compensates me for the unpleasantness of undeserved reproaches. And, indeed, what does it matter? Who twenty or thirty years hence will remember all these storms in a teacup? Or my name—with or without a shadow over it.

But enough about myself and, besides it is time to finish these fragmentary reminiscences which, I am afraid, will hardly satisfy the reader. I just want to say a few parting words to my young contemporaries, my colleagues who enter upon the slippery career of literature. I have already said once and I am ready to repeat that I am not blinded about my position. My twenty-five-year-old "service to the muses" has drawn to a close amid the growing coldness of the public, and I cannot think of any reason why it should grow warmer once more. New times have come and new men are needed; literary veterans, like the military ones, are almost always invalids, and blessed are those who know how to retire at the right time! . . .

And so, my dear colleagues, it is to you that I am addressing myself.

Greif nur hindein ins volle Menschenleben-

I would like to say to you, quoting Goethe—

Ein jeder lebt's—nicht vielen ist's bekannt.
Und wo ihr's jackt—da ist's interessant!

(i.e. "put your hand right in [I am afraid I can't translate it any better], into the very depth of human life! Everyone lives by it, but few know it, and wherever you grasp it, there it is interesting!") It is only talent that gives one the power for this "grasping," this "catching hold" of life, and one cannot acquire talent; but talent alone is not enough. What one needs is the constant communion with the environment one undertakes to reproduce; what one needs is truthful-

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ness, a truthfulness that is inexorable in relation to one's own feelings; what one needs is freedom, absolute freedom of opinions and ideas, and, finally, what one needs is education, what one needs is knowledge! "Oh, we understand! We can see what you are driving at!" many will perhaps exclaim at this point. "Potugin's ideas! ci-vi-li-za-tion, *prenez mon ours!* (It's an old, old story!)" Such exclamations do not surprise me, but they will not make me take back anything I have said. Learning is not only light, according to the Russian proverb, it is also freedom. Nothing makes a man so free as knowledge and nowhere is freedom so needed as in art, in poetry; it is not for nothing that even in official language arts are called "free." Can a man "grasp," "catch hold of" what surrounds him if he is tied up inside? Pushkin felt this deeply; it is not for nothing that he said in his immortal sonnet, a sonnet every young writer ought to learn by heart and remember as a commandment—

. . . . *by a* free *road*
Go, where your free *mind may draw you.* . . .

The absence of such freedom, incidentally, explains why not a single one of the Slavophils, in spite of their undoubted gifts, has ever created anything that is alive; not one of them knew how to remove—even for a moment—his rose-colored spectacles. But the saddest example of the absence of true freedom, arising out of the absence of true knowledge, is provided by the last work of Count L. N. Tolstoy (*War and Peace*), which at the same time exceeds by its creative force and poetic gifts almost anything that has appeared in our literature since 1840. No, without education and without freedom in the widest sense of the word—in relation to oneself and to one's preconceived ideas and systems, and, indeed, to one's people and one's history—a true artist is unthinkable; without that air, it is impossible to breathe.

As for the final result, the final appraisal of a so-called literary career—here, too, one has to remember the words of Goethe:

Sind's Rosen—nun sie werden blüh'n

—"if these are roses, they will bloom." There are no unacknowledged geniuses as there are no merits which survive their appointed time. "Sooner or later everyone finds his niche," the late Belinsky used to

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say. One has to be thankful if one has done one's bit at the right time and at the right hour. Only the few chosen ones are able to leave for posterity not only the content, but also the *form,* of their ideas and opinions, their personality, to which, generally speaking, the mob remains entirely indifferent. Ordinary individuals are condemned to total disappearance, to being swallowed up by the torrent; but they have increased its force, they have widened and deepened its bed—what more do they want?

I am laying down my pen. . . . One more last advice to young writers and one more last request. My friends, never try to justify yourselves (whatever libellous stories they may not tell about you). Don't try to explain a misunderstanding, don't be anxious either to say yourselves or to hear "the last word." Carry on with your work—and in time everything will come right. At any rate, let a considerable period of time elapse first—and then look on all the old squabbles from an historical point of view, as I have tried to do now. Let the following example serve as a lesson to you; in the course of my literary career I have only once tried "to get the facts right." Namely, when *The Contemporary Review* began assuring its subscribers in its announcements that it had dispensed with my services because of the *unfitness* of my convictions (while, in fact, it was I who, in spite of their requests, would have nothing more to do with them—of which I have documentary proof). I could not resist announcing the real state of affairs in public and—of course, suffered a complete fiasco. The younger generation were more indignant with me than ever. "How did I dare to raise my hand against their idol! What does it matter that I was right? I should have kept silent!" I profited by this lesson; I wish you, too, should profit by it.

As for my request, it is as follows: guard our Russian tongue, our beautiful Russian tongue, that treasure, that trust handed down to you by your predecessors, headed again by Pushkin! Treat this powerful instrument with respect; it may work miracles in the hands of those who know how to use it! Even those who dislike "philosophic abstractions" and "poetic sentimentalities," even to practical people, for whom language is merely a means for expressing thoughts, a means to an end, just like an ordinary lever, even to them I will say: respect at least the laws of mechanics and extract every possible use from every thing! Or else, glancing over some dull, confused, feebly

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longwinded diatribe in a journal, the reader will perforce think that instead of a *lever* you are using some antedeluvian props—that you are going back to the infancy of mechanics itself. . . .

But, enough, or I shall become longwinded myself.

PEEWEET

Peeweet, ye're a blithe-like birdie!
Whit makar has been fair to ye?
Yon whigmaleerie o a kaim gangs nid-nod
Heich on the hen-hoose-tap and whiles like the cock
Himsel ye swap aboot in the wind; 'peeweet,
Peeweet': a sang and sign o spring—an O
But ye mak time dee to hear ye
And the girn and brattle o Feberarie,
And aa the airts gie a streetch
At the nod o yer heid, ma bird,
Ma spunkie, ma ferlie—and aa this is naethin to yersel!

(*from* Ossi di Seppia)

Eugenio Montale

PEEWEET: lapwing
WHIT: what
MAKAR: poet
WHIGMALEERIE: fantastic thing
KAIM: comb
HEICH: high
WHILES: sometimes
GIRN & BRATTLE: fret and turbulence, rain and wind
FERLIE: wonderful thing

(*Translated from the Italian by Edwin Morgan*)

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H. J. Kaplan

LETTER FROM HOME

A conversation with the editors of *Partisan Review*: W. P. is interested in my first reactions to this country. "How does it feel to be back?" PR would like a piece on France, where I have been living and working for more than ten years, now that I can take a more "detached view." . . . Since I have returned, my old and rather distracted concern with what was going on at home has become a sort of anxiety. It is comparable to having a mission in a country where the language is clearly related to one you know, but different. Living on the verge of comprehension gives you the cold sweat of the mountain climber who, finding himself in trouble, strikes out along a ledge knowing only that each step forward will make it more difficult if not impossible to go back. For the moment he must concentrate on each movement ahead, but what pounds in his mind is the fear that his ledge may be leading him nowhere.

Distance simplifies and distorts, as everyone knows. So in France I was able to lecture confidently about this country which has become a great buzzing confusion since my return. Does this mean that what I have been saying to French audiences, from within the French situation, is false? I'm afraid that it does: such falsehood is inherent in human communication. But if we can apply the laws of optical geometry to reestablish the size and shape of objects in space, no such general laws exist to correct our views of each other and of other peoples. We must find specific causes for each distortion. Each situation becomes what the French call a *cas d'espece* and must be described, as it were, phenomenologically, with only the most hypothetical—if any—references to classes, categories, and laws.

Must? This is an essentially moral imperative, for it goes without saying that human situations can be and frequently are described in other ways. Polemically, for example. The odd thing is that in this country, where I am told we are in an era of great good feeling, so much

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of what purports to be reporting or description strikes a distempered note in my ear. Not the angry vituperation of political antagonists, perhaps, but something more subtle. Yet the French are less, not more, at peace with each other than we are. Even before the Algerian war it was hard to imagine that they could be more hopelessly divided. The point, I suspect, is that their differences are with each other. Ours are with ourselves.

* * *

By what delayed reflex or inner wound is one of our younger critics, to take the example which happens to be closest to me, seized with such nausea when he looks at his contemporaries? Such a feeling is less difficult to understand in the slick hack, with his jargon, his slogans, the bright patter of allusion and pun which is not so much a shortcut to thought as a substitute for it. The popular reviewer often operates within a rhetoric which demeans his belief, his perceptions, his entire experience. He simply has no genuine concern with his subject. But I cannot understand it in Leslie Fiedler, whose essay on our "Unangry Young Men" I have just read with consternation in the January issue of *Encounter*.

What depresses me in this piece is not what Fiedler says about our young: that their "devices are so dismal and unfruitful," and "not even theirs"; that they "have no new voice and no new themes"; that they are dull, docile, bored and unprotesting, "committed in advance to academic life or the salons of upper Bohemia or suburban peace." These strictures are not new, nor am I questioning their foundation in fact. If these are the youth to whom Fiedler must teach literature, he deserves our condolence and whatever comfort we can afford him in recalling that we made similar complaints about our own classmates, after all, since they too were "committed in advance" to the horrendous fates abovementioned. The young have a way of taking care of themselves—the problem is always the parents. Alas! The latter are presented as a collection of guilt-ridden ex-rebels who, having had their eye on the main chance all along, have now achieved it and can settle down to "accommodation." But if the parents have nothing but contempt for themselves, if they reduce all the complexity of their youthful experience to some sort of imbecilic "innocence" and all their aspirations to the "savour of slow disenchantment," the achievement of "middle age itself" and "places . . . cleared for comfortable living," then where is the "living memory of a commitment" which would distinguish their dullness from that of their children?

Surely, Leslie Fiedler, we were never as bad as all that. Our experiences were in any case very different, whatever the surface similarities,

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and it would be better if each man spoke for himself. But did *any* of us ever have the gruesome masochism to pour quicklime over our lives before they began? To lay them out in advance—"first violence and despair, the flirtation with failure and the commitment to radical politics; then all the savour of slow disenchantment"—with such perfect banality? I think not. I hope not. We were not so innocent then and we are not so wise now. Nor can we now "proceed to become grandfathers in peace," since if all these people had anything in common it was an elementary respect for their vocation and hence for the quality of their experience; and a belief that the "success" which you now pin on our generation like a yellow armband, was something more difficult than the foregone conclusion of professorships, editorships, government service, and what not.

* * *

Fiedler's symbolic suicide is, of course, a sort of joke. Whatever we may think of the taste displayed in such a performance, we know that he can always take his tongue from his cheek, the rope from his neck, and show us by trotting briskly to his next class that he is not dead at all. He is in fact a clever young critic with long years of ungrandfatherly activity before him. But these macabre games that he has been playing with our lives—the only ones we have!—recall me to the question of our language and to those raised by W. P. and PR. It is odd how they have all become related in my mind.

* * *

The February issue of *Commentary* has just arrived, very a propos, for it has a perceptive article by Robert Brustein on the extraordinary speechlessness of what he calls "America's New Culture Hero"; Marlon Brando's Stanley Kowalski in his numerous reincarnations. "What he says is rarely important but he has mesmerized his auditor by the effort he takes to say it. He has communicated not information but feeling; he has revealed an inner life of unspecified anguish and torment." Brustein traces this hero back to O'Neill's attempt, in *The Hairy Ape,* to "find dramatic expression for the man of lower birth," and generally confines his analysis to the evolution of the ape-like species in the theatre and cinema. "In Elvis Presley, the testament of Stanley Kowalski is being realized for, besides the physical resemblances and the explicit sexuality they share, both prophesy the ruin of culture. . . . In the hero's inarticulacy, we find represented the young American's fears of maturity, for to speak out—to be a speaker—is to be a man."

But why should young Americans fear maturity more than young people anywhere? Can it be that they lack a clearly defined image

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towards which to grow? In France little boys set out to become men, little girls to become women; there is no confusion, except in pathological cases, about what this means. Our peculiar history, the experience of pastlessness, the trauma of immigration—these and other factors have combined to make problematical and indeterminate precisely that which other cultures stamp most "organically" on their members. "A children's paradise" is one of the foreigners' most constant clichés for this country. The contours of adulthood are not yet fixed in America, and perhaps this is what accounts for our notorious idealization of childhood and the fascination, unparalleled elsewhere, which our literature has shown and continues to show for adolescence. But if parents continue to situate paradise ("The Best Years of Our Lives") in childhood—be it rough, tough, gun-toting childhood—how are the young to value maturity or even, indeed, to learn what it is?

So we have the inarticulate rage of James Dean, trying in vain to get some advice from his father in *Rebel Without A Cause.* But there is also the self-contempt of the fathers and teachers, à la Fiedler, which may be embarrassingly articulate, adorned with balanced cadences and verbal postures. Fiedler is admittedly a special case, holding down as he does a sort of Oddities Counter in the sprawling bazaar of our letters, but here he is speaking for us in *Encounter;* and he tells us in what the British call a blush-making passage at the end of his piece that he already perceives the advance guard of his imitators, rising up through the graduate schools. Alas! The critic who presents his own experience—and ours—as something inauthentic, make-believe and queer—does he not also "prophesy the ruin of culture"?

* * *

A letter from Paris brings me news of another suicide, an unsymbolic one, alas. Oscar Dominguez, the surrealist painter, alone in his studio on New Year's Eve, broke and probably drunk as he had been almost every evening for years, opened his veins and allowed himself to die with the disastrous year which had administered the final proof that he could no longer give his fantastic mind to wonder, his heart to his friends, or even his hand to his canvas. Dominguez was fifty-two and, in principle, opposed to growing old. He was a neighbor of mine and, having known him for ten years, I had ample occasion to witness the long agony of the *caiman,* as he was called in Montparnasse. A *marvelous* painter in both senses of the word, he saw his work as the visible trace or vestige of a destiny which must be marvelous or nothing, so towering was his conception of what a man should be.

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The end of Dominguez has probably brought forth a spate of articles in the Paris press on the demise of surrealism, which has been announced at least once every year during the past two decades. But important as surrealism was to Oscar as a source of image and idea and even as a form of love, he had a perfectly classical way of being an artist. He tried to establish a true relation between his life and his talent. He insisted that the only legitimate use of talent was to make one's life, dreaming and waking, *fully available;* and if surrealism was the game Dominguez played, it was because surrealism seemed to him the most exact and adequate version of what his literary friends called "the great game," on which a man staked what he had. He made a point of respecting nothing *a priori,* but his respect for this was instinctive, a matter of course, never questioned. It was simply his respect for himself.

* * *

It seems to me that there is a sort of social equivalent of this attitude in the adherence of the French with their speech. Everything may change and go to pot, but language is the continuum in which France lives. So one must go back to the Middle Ages to find texts which modern Frenchmen cannot read without a lexicon and a smattering of philology; and the educational system, if it achieves nothing else, is organized to make the language *available,* in all its resources, to everyone. Whatever catastrophes are breaking over their heads, the French never stop worrying about the richness and precision of their speech.

This is an admirable thing. Although it cannot in itself guarantee the continuing vigor of French civilization, the relation of the French to their language, and hence to their past, may have some interesting consequences as France finally commits herself to the modern adventure of economic dynamism and mass culture.

For this is what is happening: Under the elaborate political contraption, which is less a system of government than a device for preventing important decisions of any kind, the country has been undergoing profound transformations. This might be less significant culturally in a country accustomed to change, but it must be remembered that the French have sailed through the storms of recent history with scarcely a ruffle in their vital statistics. The population remained approximately stable throughout the entire first half of the present century. There was practically no unemployment during the Great Depression. As for the national product, it sagged during the Thirties, then after practically disappearing during the war rose painfully until 1950 or thereabouts, when it finally stood . . . at the level of 1929! (To appreciate what this

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means it is worth recalling that the American gross national product was tripling or quadrupling during the same period.) But then something surprising began to happen. The post-war baby boom did not level off, as the demographers had expected, but continued to add several hundred thousand people to the population every year. The economy went into a phase of positively dizzy, if financially imprudent, expansion. In fact the French economy has been growing faster than any in Europe, even faster (in percentage terms) than ours. Here is how the London *Economist* summed up the situation on January 4:

In 1956, for the first time in years, the best French manufactures reached the top international class. French methods of electrification of railways have been adopted in Britain and India. French mining engineers are modernising the Japanese mines. The Renault Dauphine in a single year has become the nearest rival to the Volkswagen in America. French aircraft, dams, and electronic telecommunications have become respected on the world markets. French industry still has innumerable dark recesses of defeatist traditionalism, but the climate has changed. . . . Expansion has now become a fetish—to the exclusion, even, of common sense—in dealing with the trade crisis. As for the wage-earner, his position advanced more in France between 1953 and 1956 than in almost any country. Recent inflation has probably cut two years out of this progress, but meanwhile the attitude of the trade unions has changed. Their vitality . . . has been revived. . . . Rising population, a bountiful agriculture easily improved, and the new sources of energy . . . give France every prospect of acquiring a fertile modern economy.

So the typical French experience of stability at a low level is giving way to an upward movement, despite the political anachronisms and the Algerian nightmare. But all this is easier to grasp and to measure than another Big Change, the moral and intellectual consequences of which are pervasive. Every Frenchman who had reached adolescence at the outbreak of the last war can recall a time when he stood, as it were, and for all he knew eternally and by divine right, in the center of the world. The Empire was intact and seemed untouchable. Europe ruled the world as it had for centuries, and France, the image and perfection of European civilization, was predominant in Europe. Is it any wonder that the immense *dégringolade* that has occurred in less than two decades has not been and probably will never be fully assimilated into the reflexes and world-view of those who lived through it as adults?

The economic revolution might be expected to engender a new optimism; and it does. On the other hand, the shift in the power relationships, which certain politicians seem to remember only in fits and starts, like old men nodding by the fire, reinforces the deep discourage-

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ment and defeatism that have hung over the country since 1940. But if these impulses are contradictory, they do not exist with equal force among all age groups and this is the key to one of the most striking phenomena in France today: the conflict (after so many others, but surely deeper than all the others) between the French youth and their elders. The popular weekly, *L'Express,* which is appropriately directed by a man in his early thirties, has recently begun a survey designed to provide a composite portrait of the younger generations. What we have in the way of results thus far confirms what we have learned from other sources: while older Frenchmen continue to dream of *La Grande Nation* and even, occasionally, of *La France Seule,* to hate the Germans and profess themselves passionately ideological, their children are almost un-French in their attachment to concrete enterprises, their interest in technology, their tendency to dismiss the old passions, national as well as ideological, from their minds.

Since time immemorial the younger classes in France have confronted an immutable world containing a fixed number of places, which could be occupied only when the older incumbents died or were driven out. *"Nous entrerons dans la carriere,"* says an old and well known student song, *"quand nos aines n'y seront plus."* Which means, literally: we shall enter upon our careers when our elders get out. So it was indeed possible for them, at least for the cynical minds among them, to see their experience prefigured in terms of Fiedler's stereotypes of revolt and accommodation. You sowed your wild oats and made love to the chambermaid. But your passions were all pretence, you were simply waiting to take over papa's job and marry a girl with some money. But now there are new jobs, more and more of them (and fewer chambermaids, by the way). Chances are that you live in a new town, or will shortly move to one, where dowries may be scarce but nobody cares whom you marry. The country is rapidly becoming motorized on the American scale; motels, gleaming Esso stations and all the claptrap of our economy—appliances, snack bars, and supermarkets—are appearing on the French scene.

Hence, one is tempted to say, Françoise Sagan. But this young lady, however slender her talent and modish her preoccupations, writes in the language of Madame de Lafayette, a seventeenth-century noblewoman who was one of the inventors of the novel of analysis. And French adolescents, including the chambermaid's daughter, have no difficulty in reading this language and reflecting on Françoise Sagan's relation to Stendhal. The continuum is there, and it is fascinating to speculate on the quality it may give to the popular-cultural developments

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which are the inevitable concomitant of the French adventure into the modern world. Provided only . . . but that would take us very far.

There remains W. P.'s question. "How does it feel to be back?" But I'm not really back yet, merely on my way. Perhaps when I've absorbed enough radio, television, magazines, newspapers, this problem of our language will become less obsessive. But where is our continuum? Why is there so much loose talk, sloppy writing, bad grammar? Today, some of our distinguished representatives are in grave discussion about whether Mr. Dillon's economic program, upon which any American foreign policy must rest, can be called a "giveaway" program or not. What will become of our political strategies if they must constantly be "sold" to people in slogans and simplisms? At the other end of the rhetorical scale, has anyone been listening to that strange murmur which comes from *The Hudson Review?* And what can we make of Mr. Fiedler when he tells us that adultery is "old hat" in the suburbs nowadays, as if one used to commit it in the illusion that it was new? Or that homosexuality is "the purest and truest protest of the latest generation?"

It's good to be on the way back, W. P., but I think I shall be a long time coming. For the moment I keep wanting to tell people that we still badly need France, not as a base for intermediate range missiles but as a reminder, *inter alia,* that a country can survive anything if it continues to respect its language. Just as a writer can survive anything, even his innocence, if he is old hat enough to respect his own life.

As for the teacher I met in Texas, who told me that her students were being taught to "get the gist" of selected pages of *The Saturday Evening Post,* since she herself "could not expect to know every word," I should like to report her to the Committee on Un-American Activities. Informing is distasteful to me, but the country's security comes first. Unfortunately the Committee, about which there was so much incoherent talk when I was last here, seems to have disappeared.

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THEATER CHRONICLE

DISGUST AND DISENCHANTMENT: NEW BRITISH AND AMERICAN PLAYS

When Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* asks his son, Brick, why he drinks, the answer, teasingly withheld until another drink is offered, finally comes forth as DISGUST, in large type. Big Daddy, exasperated, shouts back in bold type, DISGUST WITH WHAT? Of course, Brick isn't truly suffering from disgust at all, but from a wan, sex-appealy, soaking, local-color *disenchantment.*

When Archie Rice in *The Entertainer* says, "All my life I've been searching for something. I've been searching for a draught Bass you can drink all evening without running off every ten minutes, that you can get drunk on without feeling sick, and all for fourpence," he is expressing a loathing for life that includes himself, his work, his family, England, sex, history, the future. This disgust is so objective, indeed so *reasonable,* given the way Osborne sees his character's plight, that Archie—whiny, sordid, dank hair parted in the middle—has none of that surreptitious emotional appeal with which the stage and films allow their stars to decorate the homeliness of a downbeat role. There is usually a diamond sparkling somewhere about—if only the diamond-brightness of the capped teeth. In the Osborne play, the audience, dismayed by the completeness of Archie's repellent aspect, reminds itself that this coarse, spermy creature is really Laurence Olivier and it is only acting. Thus the humdrum vileness, the familiar measliness may be allowed as "entertainment." Disenchantment will usually deal with the outrageous, the mysterious, the hurt, the elegiac; and disgust will be bare, ordinary, circumstantial. "Thank God, I'm normal!" the priest of disgust sings in *The Entertainer.*

Disenchantment is the current manufacture of the American theater. Why can't people really communicate with each other? Why must everything be ugly? Why can't we think of others? And the answers come back, flushed with the tears of the ingenue. Moods of disappointment, dreamy and bitter-sweet, utterly, fiercely private, are the foundation of the plots in Tennessee Williams and William Inge. Yearnings, nostalgic reveries, the blight of childhood, hidden vices—these are the subjects of American theater as Shaw said that clandestine adultery was

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the subject of the fashionable theatre in 1921. Clandestine adultery; how postively solid and beguiling the subject would be after several decades of clandestine frigidity, clandestine impotence, clandestine homosexuality.

Yet the truth is, the commercial and aesthetic truth is, that audiences don't give a damn about childhood, the shock of adolescence, about "communication." Patrons are paying for the sex, not for the dreams, the questions, the moody resolutions. They want to know that the gay, talkative sister in *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* isn't sleeping with her husband, that the twangy, harness salesman *is* sleeping with an old flame, and doing so with a good deal of self-righteousness because his wife is too sensitive to "communicate" with him. As the curtain goes up on our stage, on a setting plain or baroque in one of the warmer States—near the frontier(Inge) or the plantation(Williams)—domesticity is soon seen to be neurotically pimpled with familiar complexes. Neurotic failure rather than *la nausée* is our theme. Lies, lies, lies—the sympathetic characters moan about life. Failures, omissions, self-delusion—particularly among the women. "Something Unspoken" is the title of one of the single act plays of Tennessee Williams now being done at the York Playhouse. Ah, something unspoken, once more; neurotic, big-framed old Southern lady-dragon still holding the usual cobweb companion or relation in bondage. The plot turns on an election to high position in the Daughters of the Confederacy: Madame Bolingbroke scheming for the throne.

Still on the stage something must happen and so we get, if not a genuine happening, a sort of revelation that passes for action. An inner light is turned on (Inge specializes in this) and the characters see they have been mistaken, have been playing life wrong, not loving enough, not feeling enough and so on. "Stressing false values" is a favorite revelation among playwrights, even though the recognition of this condition is seldom seen in real life. Tennessee Williams goes in for revelation of another sort. It is not spiritual or moral, but frankly sexual, like a sudden undressing. At the final curtain in a Williams play everyone is running about with his clothes off (Blanche's affairs in *Streetcar Named Desire,* the story of Brick's friend, Skipper, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* one of Williams's best plays).

Suddenly Last Summer, the second of the two rather scrubby Williams plays at the York, is for the deeply jaded, the hung-over. Williams has after all given us everything, and here, desperate at last, he offers up a dish of cannibalism. This is a mistake that profoundly alienates—the awful happening isn't sexual at all; it is a shipwreck not a boudoir

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tale—and so the plays have to be done Off-Broadway. Cannibalism is the revelation, but the tribal world is peopled with old friends: the tyrant Southern lady again, wheel-chaired, reticuled, fierce-voiced, loquacious, incestuous. She talks and talks, trying to protect the memory of a beloved son against the version of his death which his young cousin, now locked up in a mental hospital, is compulsively repeating. The old dragon's auditor is a young psychiatrist, strangely antiseptic like a piece of surgical gauze; he is very white, white or blond hair, white shoes and socks, light suit, and a white manner. Perhaps this young man is got up to represent the operating table, since he specializes in lobotomies. And the dragon wants the girl lobotomized. Enter mad Ophelia, looking like a member of Martha Graham's troupe, tall, thin, tense, wandering in a Graham maze. The girl tells the story of the son's death, a fate that overtakes him in a place with a very exotic name, sounding like Lope de Vega. The revelation has to do with the son's flesh being eaten by starving young urchins. The white doctor decides not to drill a hole in the girl's head and turns to tell us, the audience, that her story *may* be true. At this point we in the audience can only shout back at the playwright, "Lies, lies, lies!"

The Dark at the Top of the Stairs: Inge likes poetical titles, not sexy ones like *Cat* and *Streetcar*. The revelation in this work is moral or character improving. The young mother has been spoiling her children, trying to keep up with local society. (Stressing false values, not in the Daughters of the Confederacy way, but in the pioneer, Baptist way of Theresa Wright, the star.) Everything is going wrong with this family. The wife is clenching her fists over party dresses, infidelities, and meanwhile her saddle-salesman husband is becoming commercially extinct, like the buffalo, and they may all starve. The young daughter, very sensitive and shy, madly plays classical music on the piano to show her superiority and trueness beneath the shyness. She goes to a dance with a young Jewish boy, Sammy. Sammy kills himself because of a mean snub and daughter *learns,* or has *revealed* to her by life, that she shouldn't have been thinking of her own troubles but of Sammy who was *really* suffering. She sees, as her mother sees when she gets the lecture about the vanishing harness market, that she's been selfish just where she thought she was good. And there it is: regrets, misunderstandings, tearful scenes from the Court of Domestic Relations. Our poor old town, poor Mama, poor Papa; times past in Kansas, old nonsense from the Garden District of New Orleans—and the eternal Delta Dragon reigning forever and ever.

In *The Entertainer,* an empty, squalid music hall performer and his dejected family somehow manage to make a comment upon con-

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temporary life. This dispirited, three-generation assembly, each one obsolescent in his own way, lives in the post-war decline of England and the sheer force of the characters' disgust and despair makes its unbearable and yet indisputable point. In our theater we are so much accustomed to interior history and the private view that the attempt by John Osborne to relate his sordid theatrical scene to the desperate historical present fills the audience with unease and even a kind of suspicion. In psychodrama, Suez and the Welfare State would be considered irrelevant to the "treatment" of the patient. In Osborne's play the thing is exactly the contrary. The disgust would not be altered one bit if the characters were homosexual, incestuous, frigid or whatever. Their peculiar and terrifying obsolescence is not a "revelation" but a fact of history. Their decline is harsh and yet natural, clearly real and not likely to reverse itself. For these reasons *The Entertainer* is one of the most interesting plays since Shaw; for the same reasons it is ugly, and it offends, seriously. Woolcott Gibbs in *The New Yorker*: "extremely distressing but at the same time almost totally meaningless tragedy" and "sheer mindless vulgarity." Brooks Atkinson found this odd, fascinating play "a hollow allegory."

"Here we are, we're alone in the universe, there's no God, it just seems that it all began by something as simple as sunlight striking on a piece of rock. And here we are. We've only got ourselves."

This is Jean, Archie's daughter by his first wife: existential overtones, politically "angry," on the side of the proles against the middle class, demonstrated against Eden during the Suez Crisis, disgusted with "gloved hand in a gold coach." Jean has a good bit to say, but she is rather dull, much too earnest and thoughtful. (These serious young women wander about plays of every sort, scattering boredom like dandruff on the stage, excused only by the fact that the role may be giving some young female theatrical experience. Indeed the only really interesting girl in the plays of recent years is Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.)

And Frank, Archie's son, who went to jail as a conscientious objector:

"Look around you. . . . You'd better start thinking about number one, Jeannie, because nobody else is going to do it for you. Nobody else is going to do it for you because nobody believes in that stuff any more. Oh, they may say they do, and may take a few bob out of your pay packet every week and stick stamps on your card to prove it, but don't believe it—nobody will give you a second look."

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The English past is represented by Archie's father, a dignified, dreamy old "entertainer" who is always giving his dignified, dreamy retirement speech.

"I feel sorry for you people. You don't know what it's really like. You haven't lived most of you. You've never known what it was like, you're all miserable really."

And Archie's tired wife, who drinks too much, and shows those qualities of the lower middle class in English which seem to endure as long as the breath holds out. About the Duchess of Porth, this beaten, boozy wife says, or can *still* say, "I suppose it's a bit silly, but I've always taken an interest in her. Oh, ever since she was quite young. I feel she must be very nice somehow."

These characters are not triumphs of dramatic composition; they are flattened out for the stage like so many pairs of pajamas put through a mangle. They stand for anger, despair, nostalgia, distracted fidelity in the same way that the gin bottle stands for joy, and personal responsibility is represented by urgings to "eat a little something." Still each one has his moment or two and Osborne's dialogue is brisk and vivid enough to carry them along. The whole play is Archie Rice; it is this strange creation of Osborne's and not the meaning to be got from the decline of the music hall art that gives this work its extraordinary character.

So far as the music hall is concerned, Osborne says in his preface to the printed text, "The music hall is dying, and with it, a significant part of England." He dedicates the play to A.C. "who remembers what it was like, and will not forget it; who, I hope, will never let me forget it. . . ." But he has resisted the temptation to use the music hall glamorously or to pad his play with jokes and songs. The music hall parts are just as grubby, just as unrelieved, just as appalling as the Rice tenement where the rest of the action takes place. "Tatty backcloths," the most antique and hopeless jokes, the scabby, dreary indolence of Archie's act: these brief moments of "entertainment" simply stagger the spirit with their tonelessness, their deathly hoarseness. These tawdry turns, these leers, and above all the terrible, terrible fatigue, the exhausted laughter: no doubt this is the proper requiem for the death of the folk arts.

Archie Rice is the same empty, callous, bored master of ceremonies at home that he is in front of his ROCK'N ROLL NEW'D LOOK backdrop at the theatre. Callousness, not bullying, is the mark of this incredible father and husband—he is as dry as an old lemon rind. "Why should I care? Why should I let it touch me?" he croaks in one of his

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interludes. Archie's disgust with life, his abysmal carelessness, cover every activity he can conceive of. He chases women, we are told, but romance or even the merest sexual exaltation is impossible for him. "Have you ever had it on a kitchen table? Like a piece of meat on a slab." This utterly nihilistic fornicator likes, dredging up old tin cans from the well of his experience, to generalize too: "Either they're doing it, and they're not enjoying it. Or else they're not doing it and they aren't enjoying it." Archie has a gross and tenacious passion for crude reality. This is not particularly a virtue in his case, nor even a mark of insight; it is a grotesque dividend from his failure to care. He is not a great villain, but a small one given to meaningless love affairs and petty dishonesties. Archie does not assassinate the king, he cheats on his income tax, and while he *fears* nothing he does vaguely *worry* about the ghost of the tax collector who haunts his sleep.

A number of notes are struck in the play; not all of them are interestingly developed, but a curious excitement comes at every point from the mere attempt to make contemporary noise on the stage. The oily, jangling entertainer threatens; allegory and premonition cling to him like the smell of his costumes, the grease on his hatband.

Endgame by Samuel Beckett is pure disgust, with no other element mixed in. It is a white, covering, freezing snow, nearly unbearable. Utter desolation and hatred of life; ashes, ash cans, blindness, death, slavery, empty tyranny, ghostly giggles, bareness, meanness, starvation. This work has the power to terrify. In sheer pain you go on scene after scene, from nothing to yet another nothing. "Ah the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them!" Where one understands the meaning the relief is such that a smile comes involuntarily. "Use your head, can't you, use your head, you're on earth, there's no cure for that!" and

"A flea! Are there still fleas?"
"On me there's one."
"But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him for the love of God!"

The relief lasts no longer than the batting of an eye. The pitiless misery continues. Is it good or bad art? Complete, merciless, it has a sort of therapeutic beauty and truth, like the sight of an open grave. It would be presumptuous to say that this misery and disgust are not enough. Indeed it is all too much, the end of the line, and overpowering in the purity of its deathly summations.

Elizabeth Hardwick

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FILM CHRONICLE

REFLECTIONS ON HORROR MOVIES

Although horror movies have recently been enjoying a vogue, they have always been perennial supporting features among Grade B and C fare. The popularity of the form is no doubt partly explained by its ability to engage the spectator's feelings without making any serious demand on his mind. In addition, however, horror movies covertly embody certain underground assumptions about science which reflect popular opinions.

The horror movies I am mainly concerned with I have divided into three major categories: Mad Doctor, Atomic Beast and Interplanetary Monster. They do not exhaust all the types but they each contain two essential characters, the Scientist and the Monster, towards whom the attitudes of the movies are in a revealing state of change.

The Mad Doctor series is by far the most long lived of the three. It suffered a temporary decline in the Forties when Frankenstein, Dracula, and the Wolfman (along with their countless offspring) were first loaned out as straight men to Abbott and Costello and then set out to graze in the parched pastures of the cheap all-night movie houses, but it has recently demonstrated its durability in a group of English remakes and a Teen-age Monster craze. These films find their roots in certain European folk myths. Dracula was inspired by an ancient Balkan superstition about vampires, the Werewolf is a Middle European folk myth recorded, among other places, in the Breton *lais* of Marie de France, and even Frankenstein, though out of Mary Shelley by the Gothic tradition, has a medieval prototype in the Golem, a monster the Jews fashioned from clay and earth to free them from oppression. The spirit of these films is still medieval, combining a vulgar religiosity with folk superstitions. Superstition now, however, has been crudely transferred from magic and alchemy to creative science, itself a form of magic to the untutored mind. The devil of the Vampire and Werewolf myths, who turned human beings into baser animals, today has become a scientist, and the metamorphosis is given a technical name—it is a "regression" into an earlier state of evolution. The alchemist and devil-conjuring scholar, Dr. Faustus, gives way to Dr. Frankenstein, the

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research physician, while the magic circle, the tetragrammaton, and the full moon are replaced by test tubes, complicated electrical apparatus, and Bunsen burners.

Frankenstein, like Faustus, defies God by exploring areas where humans are not meant to trespass. In Mary Shelley's book (it is subtitled *A Modern Prometheus*), Frankenstein is a latter-day Faustus, a superhuman creature whose aspiration embodies the expansiveness of his age. In the movies, however, Frankenstein loses his heroic quality and becomes a lunatic monomaniac, so obsessed with the value of his work that he no longer cares whether his discovery prove a boon or a curse to mankind. When the mad doctor, his eyes wild and inflamed, bends over his intricate equipment, pouring in a little of this and a little of that, the spectator is confronted with an immoral being whose mental superiority is only a measure of his madness. Like the popular image of the theoretical scientist engaged in basic research ("Basic research," says Charles Wilson, "is science's attempt to prove that grass is green"), he succeeds only in creating something badly which nature has already made well. The Frankenstein monster is a parody of man. Ghastly in appearance, clumsy in movement, criminal in behavior, imbecilic of mind, it is superior only in physical strength and resistance to destruction. The scientist has fashioned it in the face of divine disapproval (the heavens disgorge at its birth)—not to mention the disapproval of friends and frightened townspeople—and it can lead only to trouble.

For Dr. Frankenstein, however, the monster symbolizes the triumph of his intellect over the blind morality of his enemies and it confirms him in the ultimate soundness of his thought ("They thought I was mad, but this proves who is the superior being"). When it becomes clear that his countrymen are unimpressed by his achievement and regard him as a menace to society, the monster becomes the agent of his revenge. As it ravages the countryside and terrorizes the inhabitants, it embodies and expresses the scientist's own lust and violence. It is an extension of his own mad soul, come to life not in a weak and ineffectual body but in a body of formidable physical power. (In a movie like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* the identity of monster and doctor is even clearer; Mr. Hyde, the monster, is the aggressive and libidinous element in the benevolent Dr. Jekyll's personality.) The rampage of the monster is the rampage of mad, unrestrained science which inevitably turns on the scientist, destroying him too. As the lava bubbles over the sinking head of the monster, the crude moral of the film frees itself from the horror and is asserted. Experimental science (and by extension

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knowledge itself) is superfluous, dangerous, and unlawful, for in exploring the unknown, it leads man to usurp God's creative power. Each of these films is a victory for obscurantism, flattering the spectator into believing that his intellectual inferiority is a sign that he is loved by God.

The Teen-age Monster films, a very recent phenomenon, amend the assumptions of these horror movies in a startling manner. Their titles—*I Was a Teenage Werewolf, I Was a Teenage Frankenstein, Blood of Dracula,* and *Teenage Monster*—(some wit awaits one called *I Had a Teenage Monkey on My Back*)—suggest a Hollywood prank, but they are deadly serious, mixing the conventions of early horror movies with the ingredients of adolescent culture. The doctor, significantly enough, is no longer a fringe character whose madness can be inferred from the rings around his eyes and his wild hair but a respected member of society, a high-school chemistry teacher (*Blood of Dracula*) or a psychoanalyst (*Teenage Werewolf*) or a visiting lecturer from Britain (*Teenage Frankenstein*). Although he gives the appearance of benevolence—he pretends to help teen-agers with their problems—behind this facade he hides evil experimental designs. The monster, on the other hand, takes on a more fully developed personality. He is a victim who begins inauspiciously as an average, though emotionally troubled, adolescent and ends, through the influence of the doctor, as a voracious animal. The monster as teen-ager becomes the central character in the film and the teen-age audience is expected to identify and sympathize with him.

In *I Was a Teenage Werewolf,* the hero is characterized as brilliant but erratic in his studies and something of a delinquent. At the suggestion of his principal, he agrees to accept therapy from an analyst helping maladjusted students. The analyst gets the boy under his control and, after injecting him with a secret drug, turns him into a werewolf. Against his will he murders a number of his contemporaries. When the doctor refuses to free him from this curse, he kills him and is himself killed by the police. In death, his features relax into the harmless countenance of an adolescent.

The crimes of the adolescent are invariably committed against other youths (the doctor has it in for teen-agers) and are always connected with those staples of juvenile culture, sex and violence. The advertising displays show the male monsters, dressed in leather jackets and blue jeans, bending ambiguously over the diaphanously draped body of a luscious young girl while the female teen-age vampire of *Blood of Dracula,* her nails long and her fangs dripping, is herself half-dressed and lying on top of a struggling male (whether to rape or murder him is not clear). The identification of sex and violence is further underlined

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by the promotion blurbs: "In her eyes DESIRE! in her veins—the blood of a MONSTER!" (*Blood of Dracula*); "A Teenage Titan on a Lustful Binge that Paralyzed a Town with Fear" (*Teenage Monster*). It is probable that these crimes are performed less reluctantly than is suggested and that the adolescent spectator is more thrilled than appalled by this "lustful binge" which captures the attention of the adult community. The acquisition of power and prestige through delinquent sexual and aggressive activity is a familiar juvenile fantasy (the same distributors exploit it more openly in films like *Reform School Girl* and *Drag-Strip Girl*), one which we can see frequently acted out by delinquents in our city schools. In the Teen-age Monster films, however, the hero is absolved of his aggressive and libidinous impulses. Although he both feels and acts on them, he can attribute the responsibility to the mad scientist who controls his behavior. What these films seem to be saying, in their underground manner, is that behind the harmless face of the high-school chemistry teacher and the intellectual countenance of the psychoanalyst lies the warped authority responsible for teen-age violence. The adolescent feels victimized by society—turned into a monster by society—and if he behaves in a delinquent manner, society and not he is to blame. Thus, we can see one direction in which the hostility for experimental research, explicit in the Mad Doctor films, can go—it can be transmuted into hatred of adult authority itself.

Or it can go underground, as in the Atomic Beast movies. The Mad Doctor movies, in exploiting the supernatural, usually locate their action in Europe (often a remote Bavarian village) where wild fens, spectral castles, and ominous graveyards provide the proper eerie background. The Atomic Beast movies depend for their effect on the contemporary and familiar and there is a corresponding change in locale. The monster (or "thing" as it is more often called) appears now in a busy American city—usually Los Angeles to save the producer money—where average men walk about in business suits. The thing terrorizes not only the hero, the heroine, and a few anonymous (and expendable) characters in Tyrolean costumes, but the entire world. Furthermore, it has lost all resemblance to anything human. It appears as a giant ant (*Them!*), a prehistoric animal (*Beast From Twenty Thousand Fathoms*), an outsized grasshopper (*Beginning of the End*) or a monstrous spider (*Tarantula*). Although these films, in their deference to science fiction, seem to smile more benignly on scientific endeavor, they are unconsciously closer to the anti-theoretical biases of the Mad Doctor series than would first appear.

All these films are similarly plotted, so the plot of *The Beginning*

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of the End will serve as an example of the whole genre. The scene opens on a pair of adolescents necking in their car off a desert road. Their attention is caught by a weird clicking sound, the boy looks up in horror, the girl screams, the music stings and the scene fades. In the next scene, we learn that the car has been completely demolished and its occupants have disappeared. The police, totally baffled, are conducting fruitless investigations when word comes that a small town nearby has been destroyed in the same mysterious way. Enter the young scientist hero. Examining the wreckage of the town, he discovers a strange fluid which when analyzed proves to have been manufactured by a giant grasshopper. The police ridicule his conclusions and are instantly attacked by a fleet of these grasshoppers, each fifteen feet high, which wipe out the entire local force and a few state troopers. Interrupting a perfunctory romance with the heroine, the scientist flies to Washington to alert the nation. He describes the potential danger to a group of bored politicians and yawning big brass, but they remain skeptical until word comes that the things have reached Chicago and are crushing buildings and eating the occupants. The scientist is then put in charge of the army and air force. Although the military men want to evacuate the city and drop an atomic bomb on it, the scientist devises a safer method of destroying the creatures and proceeds to do so through exemplary physical courage and superior knowledge of their behavior. The movie ends on a note of foreboding: have the things been completely exterminated?

Externally, there seem to be very significant changes indeed, especially in the character of the scientist. No longer fang-toothed, long-haired, and subject to delirious ravings (Bela Lugosi, John Carradine, Basil Rathbone), the doctor is now a highly admired member of society, muscular, handsome, and heroic (John Agar). He is invariably wiser, more reasonable, and more humane than the bone-headed bureaucrats and trigger-happy brass that compose the members of his "team," and he even has sexual appeal, a quality which Hollywood's eggheads have never enjoyed before. The scientist-hero, however, is not a very convincing intellectual. Although he may use technical, polysyllabic language when discussing his findings, he always yields gracefully to the admonition to "tell us in our own words, Doc" and proves that he can speak as simply as you or I; in the crisis, in fact, he is almost monosyllabic. When the chips are down, he loses his glasses (a symbol of his intellectualism) and begins to look like everyone else. The hero's intellect is part of his costume and makeup, easily shed when heroic action is demanded. That he is always called upon not only to outwit

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the thing but to wrestle with it as well (in order to save the heroine) indicates that he is in constant danger of tripping over the thin boundary between specialist and average Joe.

The fact remains that there is a new separation between the scientist and the monster. Rather than being an extension of the doctor's evil will, the monster functions completely on its own, creating havoc through its predatory nature. We learn through charts, biological film, and the scientist's patient explanations that ants and grasshoppers are not the harmless little beasties they appear but actually voracious insects who need only the excuse of size to prey upon humanity. The doctor, rather than allying himself with the monster in its rampage against our cities, is in strong opposition to it, and reverses the pattern of the Mad Doctor films by destroying it.

And yet, if the individual scientist is absolved of all responsibility for the "thing," science somehow is not. These films suggest an uneasiness about science which, though subtle and unpremeditated, reflect unconscious American attitudes. These attitudes are sharpened when we examine the genesis of the thing for, though it seems to rise out of nowhere, it is invariably caused by a scientific blunder. The giant ants of *Them!*, for example, result from a nuclear explosion which caused a mutation in the species; another fission test has awakened, in *Beast From Twenty Thousand Fathoms,* a dinosaur encrusted in polar icecaps; the spider of *Tarantula* grows in size after having been injected with radioactive isotopes, and escapes during a fight in the lab between two scientists; the grasshoppers of *Beginning of the End* enlarge after crawling into some radioactive dust carelessly left about by a researcher. We are left with a puzzling sub-statement: science destroys the thing but scientific experimentation has created it.

I think we can explain this equivocal attitude when we acknowledge that the thing "which is too horrible to name," which owes its birth to an atomic or nuclear explosion, which begins in a desert or frozen waste and moves from there to cities, and which promises ultimately to destroy the world, is probably a crude symbol for the bomb itself. The scientists we see represented in these films are unlike the Mad Doctors in another more fundamental respect: they are never engaged in basic research. The scientist uses his knowledge in a purely defensive manner, like a specialist working on rocket interception or a physician trying to cure a disease. The isolated theoretician who tinkers curiously in his lab (and who invented the atomic bomb) is never shown, only the practical working scientist who labors to undo the harm. The thing's destructive rampage against cities, like the rampage of the Franken-

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stein monster, is the result of too much cleverness, and the consequences for all the world are only too apparent.

These consequences are driven home more powerfully in movies like *The Incredible Shrinking Man* and *The Amazing Colossal Man* where the audience gets the opportunity to identify closely with the victims of science's reckless experimentation. The hero of the first movie is an average man who, through contact with fallout while on his honeymoon, begins to shrink away to nothing. As he proceeds to grow smaller, he finds himself in much the same dilemma as the other heroes of the *Atomic Beast* series: he must do battle with (now) gigantic insects in order to survive. Scientists can do nothing to save him—after a while they can't even find him—so as he dwindles into an atomic particle he finally turns to God for whom "there is no zero." The inevitable sequel, *The Amazing Colossal Man*, reverses the dilemma. The hero grows to enormous size through the premature explosion of a plutonium bomb. Size carries with it the luxury of power but the hero cannot enjoy his new stature. He feels like a freak and his body is proceeding to outgrow his brain and heart. Although the scientists labor to help him and even succeed in reducing an elephant to the size of a cat, it is too late; the hero has gone mad, demolished Las Vegas and fallen over Boulder Dam. The victimization of man by theoretical science has become, in these two movies, less of a suggestion and more of a fact.

In the Interplanetary Monster movies, Hollywood handles the public's ambivalence toward science in a more obvious way, by splitting the scientist in two. Most of these movies feature both a practical scientist who wishes to destroy the invader and a theoretical scientist who wants to communicate with it. In *The Thing*, for example, we find billeted among a group of more altruistic average-Joe colleagues with crew cuts an academic long-haired scientist of the Dr. Frankenstein type. When the evil thing (a highly evolved vegetable which, by multiplying itself, threatens to take over the world) descends in a flying saucer, this scientist tries to perpetuate its life in order "to find out what it knows." He is violently opposed in this by the others who take the occasion to tell him that such amoral investigation produced the atomic bomb. But he cannot be reasoned with and almost wrecks the entire party. After both he and the thing are destroyed, the others congratulate themselves on remaining safe, though in the dark. In *Forbidden Planet* (a sophisticated thriller inspired in part by Shakespeare's *Tempest*), the good and evil elements in science are represented, as in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, by the split personality of the scientist. He is

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urbane and benevolent (Walter Pidgeon plays the role) and is trying to realize an ideal community on the far-off planet he has discovered. Although he has invented a robot (Ariel) who cheerfully performs man's baser tasks, we learn that he is also responsible, though unwittingly, for a terrible invisible force (Caliban) overwhelming in its destructiveness. While he sleeps, the aggressive forces in his libido activate a dynamo he has been tinkering with which gives them enormous power to kill those the doctor unconsciously resents. Thus, Freudian psychology is evoked to endow the scientist with guilt. At the end, he accepts his guilt and sacrifices his life in order to combat the being he has created.

The Interplanetary Monster series sometimes reverses the central situation of most horror films. We often find the monster controlling the scientist and forcing him to do its evil will. In *It Conquered the World* (the first film to capitalize on Sputnik and Explorer), the projection of a space satellite proves to be a mistake, for it results in the invasion of America by a monster from Venus. The monster takes control of the scientist who, embittered by the indifference of the masses towards his ideas, mistakenly thinks the monster will free men from stupidity. This muddled egghead finally discovers the true intentions of the monster and destroys it, dying himself in the process. In *The Brain From Planet Arous,* a hideous brain inhabits the mind of a nuclear physicist with the intention of controlling the universe. As the physical incarnation of the monster, the scientist is at the mercy of its will until he can free himself of its influence. The monster's intellect, like the intellect of the Mad Doctor, is invariably superior, signified graphically by its large head and small body (in the last film named it is nothing but Brain). Like the Mad Doctor, its superior intelligence is always accompanied by moral depravity and an unconscionable lust for power. If the monster is to be destroyed at all, this will not be done by matching wits with it but by finding some chink in its armor. The chink quite often is a physical imperfection: in *War of the Worlds*, the invading Martians are stopped, at the height of their victory, by their vulnerability to the disease germs of earth. Before this Achilles heel is discovered, however, the scientist is controlled to do evil, and with the monster and the doctor in collaboration again, even in this qualified sense, the wheel has come full circle.

The terror of most of these films, then, stems from the matching of knowledge with power, always a source of fear for Americans—when Nietzsche's Superman enters comic book culture he loses his intellectual and spiritual qualities and becomes a muscle man. The muscle man, even with X-ray vision, poses no threat to the will, but muscle in col-

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laboration with mind is generally thought to have a profound effect on individual destinies. The tendency to attribute everything that happens in the heavens, from flying saucers to Florida's cold wave, to science and the bomb ("Why don't they stop," said an old lady on the bus behind me the other day, "they don't know what they're doing") accounts for the extreme ways in which the scientist is regarded in our culture: either as a protective savior or as a destructive blunderer. It is little wonder that America exalts the physician (and the football player) and ignores the physicist. These issues, the issues of the great debate over scientific education and basic research, assert themselves crudely through the unwieldy monster and the Mad Doctor. The films suggest that the academic scientist, in exploring new areas, has laid the human race open to devastation either by human or interplanetary enemies—the doctor's madness, then, is merely a suitable way of expressing a conviction that the scientist's idle curiosity has shaken itself loose from prudence or principle. There is obviously a sensitive moral problem involved here, one which needs more articulate treatment than the covert and superstitious way it is handled in horror movies. That the problem is touched there at all is evidence of how profoundly it has stirred the American psyche.

Robert Brustein

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ART CHRONICLE

SPACE IN ABSTRACT PAINTING

A logician friend and I were arguing about paradox. He thought it did not really exist, it was produced by misunderstanding. I suggested painting, which could be both flat and not flat at the same time. But, my friend pursued, didn't I really mean that as a physical object the picture was flat, but that as an imaginative visual object, as scene or composition, it was not flat? No, I did not think so, it was precisely as an imaginative object that the picture could be both flat and not flat at once. He insisted, but did I not really mean that looking at it one way made it seem flat, and looking at it another way made it appear not flat? No, I felt that in the moment of seeing, the picture was both flat and not flat all at once. Ordinary language did not seem to help us, and we ended in disagreement, he feeling, I'm sure, that I was beyond the help of logic, and I feeling that he couldn't have "seen" the painting I had in mind. The discussion comes back to me now because much recent painting seems to make precisely my point, and to do so in a new way. There is a distinctively different look to many pictures, a hint of something new in others, and the difference seems to involve the treatment of pictorial space.

Of course it would be a mistake to think that depth and space were ever entirely out of abstract painting. The cubists closed up depth and placed their forms in very shallow space; not only that, they presented decomposed and multifaceted forms, and broke up even that shallow space by disposing forms which related to different spatial systems. The surrealists, on the other hand, were not interested in the composed abstract tension of the surface, and painted realistic scenes of fantastic objects, or mocked the older illusion of depth by distorting central perspective, or floated loose abstracted shapes in an unmeasured, unspecified atmosphere. In a sense, abstract expressionist painting could be said to have combined that atmosphere of surrealist art with the tension and surface abstractness of cubism.

A painter like de Kooning continued to preserve something of the counterpointed depth of cubism, although in a different form, but the general direction of abstract expressionist painting was away from con-

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structed depth, even of the narrow shallow kind. Of course the nature of visual perception might insure that some depth effect is always present, because of the way the eye sees figure and ground—no matter how much depth is controverted. But it can be so obstructed that only hints of it remain. For example, the very size of abstract expressionist painting—consistently so much larger than most of the large works of cubism and surrealism—could interfere with the depth effect as well as enhance it. And the all-over picture of ceaseless quivering movement was a kind of culmination of counterpointed depth, and a significant one: beyond it is that perfection which is to be found in the picture painted all in one color with only the faintest variation in brush strokes. That *is* a kind of perfection, a perfect resolution of forces, a kind of *liebestod*.

At this point it seems important to distinguish between depth and space, because they are not the same, and yet they are intimately related. Put simply, perhaps depth could be said to recede and space to range or expand. Depth may also be more specific, more regulated, and more crowded, showing us how a number of objects or shapes relate to the area in which they move, while space indicates the force exerted between them, less measurable, more protean. Depth, roughly, would be a particular organization of space. In a picture we can be given an illusion of depth, but nothing can provide an illusion of space, because space is from the beginning a pictorial quality and can be created by pictorial means whether or not depth is also indicated. This is what non-Western and pre-Renaissance painting show us.

What I have called the counterpointed depth of abstract painting began to have a curious effect: although the flat surface was preserved, the picture began to move forward, almost as if it would explode out in the face of the spectator. (This aesthetic fact can be seen to explain something about the aggressive quality perceived in advanced painting. The supposed "attack" on the spectator is in a sense the function of a limited depth, which insists that the picture move *out,* both in size and in direction.) Even as abstract expressionist painting became larger, the flatness combined with this outward explosion to produce a closely worked, crowded picture with an inevitable claustral effect. De Kooning's *Asheville* is an example of this, and the same thing can be seen in so much of the painting which is influenced by him. Size could counteract the claustral, but only in a very limited way. The all-over picture could do so only by reduction, or by unifying the abstractness of the surface to the point of monotony, as in some of Tomlin's pictures. The claustral had been less of a problem in early cubist pictures, but in the forty-odd

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creasing explicitness, even the space suggested by that faceted monochromatic light was absorbed into the abstraction of every inch of canvas. The revival of interest in Monet's late paintings makes sense only against this background, although much of the interest was faddish or superficial, and ignored the real relevance of the pictures. More than anything else attributed to him, Monet showed how the surface could create space, and this suggests a rout of the claustral.

Last year, in these pages, I commented on a new development in Hofmann's work, the introduction of squares of color which seemed unrelated to the pictures. This seemed very puzzling, I felt something was going on, but I wasn't sure what it could be. The squares appeared to be on top of the picture, creating a different surface, and were painted differently from the rest of the picture. Some people did not notice this, others noticed it but weren't bothered by it. Again in the Hofmann retrospective, the same squares made their appearance, as did some elements of calligraphy somehow connected with them, and once more I was puzzled. Recently, however, after seeing Hofmann's show of new work at the Kootz Gallery, it seems to me that last year's pictures hinted of something which was more fully presented this year—an attempt to save more space for abstract painting.

In Hofmann's new pictures, the squares can still be seen, but greatly transformed, larger, painted differently, more a part of the picture, incorporating the earlier suggestion. Before this, they *were* on top of the picture, and now I see this as precisely the point. They looked ahead to a way of holding the surface and thus creating a new kind of space. If you think of the Monets again, what gives them their space without the illusion of depth is not so much the breathing of the paint surface, but that the abstractness of the forms as we now see them "set" the surface, hold it, become the surface with such force and ambiguity at once that the greatest space develops without any sacrifice of the two-dimensional quality. In the *Water Lilies,* that large pinkish-white area straying down from the top does this; the fact that it starts directly at the top, almost from outside the picture, is of no little significance. Monet often did something like this, whether with poppies beginning at the left edge and moving down to the bottom, or water lilies beginning at both left and right, or a narrow horizontal cloud held at one edge. These structural features are of the greatest importance, this relation to the edge, and they prevent the pictures from being either purely decorative surface *or* shadowy forms seen under glass. And if some of what is called Abstract Impressionism seems weak compared with Monet, the lack of energy might be closely connected with the indifference to just such structural elements.

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Hofmann's pictures, very different in manner, and with cubism and surrealism and everything else behind them, already work with the abstract consciousness of the picture plane and edge, but the earlier squares of last year's picture might be seen as a kind of projection, vis à vis his new pictures—like Monet's poppies of the late 1880's in relation to the clouds and water lilies of his late paintings. Holding the surface by attention to the outer edge of the picture had already been explored by Cezanne, and Picasso, and Matisse, and has been employed by every abstract painter since then. In a sense, Hofmann did not need to do that. But his discovery of still another surface in his work has the effect of making the picture explode out, up, and back into space. Pictures like *Floral Composition,* 1954, or *X-1955* have much more the effect of exploding forward, when considered with *The Ocean, Autumn Gold, Autumnal Glory—Swamp Series, Early Dawn,* and others in the recent show of 1957 work.

The point is made in a more specific and also more limited fashion in the work of Sam Francis, at the Martha Jackson Gallery. This painter's previous work had been "all-over," with glowing, dripping spots in the same basic color. The new pictures are very different. The blue and red forms stray and straggle across the top, beginning at each side; the greater part of the picture is bare. In fact, these pictures showed more unpainted space than any I can recall in a long while, but the important thing is that the space never appeared empty. What was new was the way the forms acted in and against the space, around it, defining it, making it move almost as a kind of abstract baroque space. The forms act as if their direction were away from the spectator, instead of toward, using the surface to define a space which was extending quite beyond them. Put imprecisely, it was as if the forms had their backs to the spectator.

If your eyes are attuned to the closely worked thick painting of which de Kooning is a master, and which has spread from him to so many others, then the kind of spatial organization I have in mind will perhaps seem fragmentary, incomplete, errant. The space in Sam Francis's new pictures *could* look empty, if you expected something else from it. Perhaps another approach to the problem can be seen in the new pictures of Adolph Gottlieb, shown at the Andre Emmerich Gallery, compared with the retrospective of his work at the Jewish Museum earlier in the season. His really new pictures are the "bursts" and "blasts" —great red or green blobs, bursts of color on an unpainted ground, and beneath them, scraggly black. Although these pictures are related to his earlier "groundscapes," some of which were exhibited with them,

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the difference between the two is striking. The groundscape combined the impulse of the all-over and of the explosive, two kinds of space which would pull against each other. The spots or suns in the flat area above, however, did not generate as much force because in a sense they shared it with the complicated movement of the ground beneath them. In the newer pictures, the spots have gathered to themselves more of the febrile linear activity characteristic of the ground, and as a consequence they are much more powerful, while the ground has been reduced to the straggling black mass beneath. More intensely the "burst" creates space around itself, especially behind it, and it moves out and back as much if not more than it comes forward. A precursor of these pictures was *Black, Blue and Red,* 1956, in the Jewish Museum show as well as in last year's show at Martha Jackson. But that did not make the point which the new ones do, for several reasons: the black mass beneath was still more of a ground than a mass, there was an indecision between the all-over and the explosive, so that the "burst" had less unitary force; and last, but most important, this was done on a chalky, somewhat muddied blue against which neither the red nor the black could act properly. I remember thinking it "powder-puffy"—something I would not say about the new ones. Actually, a hint of this same spatial development, an early response to the problem could have been seen in Paul Feeley's "spot" pictures shown in 1955 at the de Nagy Gallery. Feeley's new pictures indicated a more explicit and more ambitious attack on the shape in space. Two of these were especially successful, one, a very large light cerise with a yellow jug-like shape and a large yellow spot, and another, smaller, with three rust-red spots. Others explore large crevice-like divisions of the picture, creating space by a massive jumping of figure and ground.

What is Mark Rothko's relation to the kind of space I have been discussing? It seems to me an ambiguous one. Certainly his enormous pictures made of fuzzy-edged bands of color (at the Janis Gallery) are very different from the busily working claustral peiture. And there is no doubt that their size, their luminous compelling simplicity gives them (like the Feeleys) a quality of being *there.* For some people this is a kind of unlimited, illimitable landscape of being itself. They have their backs to the spectator also, and the large rectangular areas of glowing color loom above, almost cover, the thin edged areas around them. What happens behind the color is mysterious and unknown, and nothing is disclosed. The bands of color do not create space, they suggest it, but the effect is all suggestion, all promise of something, and the spatial cues are limited. Although the surface is employed (and this suggests

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a resemblance to the kind of thing I spoke of earlier), it is almost in the direction of the all-over. The claustral effect is avoided by an extreme reduction of means, and a kind of transcendence of plastic struggle, but perhaps one claustral effect is substituted for another.

In Helen Frankenthaler's pictures, shown at the de Nagy Gallery, the space is achieved by a great variety of means rather than by a reduction: her thinned paint which soaks into the unsized canvas, the large unpainted areas, the varied forms, the use of line and of linear straying forms are all far more important in creating space than any massed structure, or central image, and this accounts for the sense of airiness and expanding space which the pictures show. Instead of a closely interwoven, interlocked organization, there will be floating shapes detached from one another, suspended above or in front or on the surface, but placed with a precise consciousness of the surface, which allows the picture to work up and back in greater breadth than before. Frequently a lesson from Monet can be observed, in the use of the picture's edge to "set" a surface which then needs only an implicit treatment, as in the rust-red and green forms climbing up from the bottom in *Jacob's Dream.* Only one picture, *Revolution,* shows the constriction and closeness, the claustral effect of an earlier kind of painting. Its large central red area, however, resembles other still areas in other pictures, such as in *Western Dream,* or in *Hommage à Chardin,* which have a very different spatial effect.

If a new look of space is not exactly new in abstract painting, and yet seems more prominent recently, how should we account for it? Does it bear any relation to a greater consciousness of nature among abstract painters, an abandoning of the world of the self? This suggestion is advanced by the Whitney Museum's show of painting and sculpture selected to illustrate the theme "Nature in Abstraction." In a short essay accompanying the handsome exhibition catalogue, John I. H. Baur is far from wanting to see in these works the actual abstraction of natural objects, although pictures such as Karl Knaths' *Winter Wharf,* Hans Moller's *Forsythias,* David Hare's *Fruit Tree* or Robert Goodnough's *Tree in the Field* might come close to it; nor does he necessarily want to suggest the kind of abstract impressionist impulse in Ethel Schwabacher's *Dead Leaves,* Hyde Solomon's *Vermont Autumn,* or Jon Schueler's *Evening.* The artists who responded to Mr. Baur's questions about the influence of nature were more conscious of a generalized and oblique use of it (some of them denied even that), and although the show itself was interesting, its point about nature seemed to be that nature may be important for artists but in ways so various as to preclude any attempt to define its importance!

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I wonder whether this show might have remained the same if all the titles were changed and if the questionnaire had been about the self and the unconscious. It seems to me that the selection might not have had to be changed at all! That is, I think that only a few of the works exhibited show in *a plastic way* the new sense for space, and furthermore there is some question how far this is related to nature. A painter like Gorky, whose *Waterfall* is in the show, was always very responsive to nature, but until the end of his life he continued to work primarily in the older kind of space. Mr. Baur suggests that the inspiration from the self, which seemed to characterize earlier phases of abstract expressionism, has been succeeded by an inspiration from nature, which shows itself in the greater sense for space. Yet if Pollock's *Ocean Greyness* had been called *The Grey Unconscious,* would it have less movement in it, even of the elemental sort? Does Paul Jenkins's *Black Dahlia* really suggest nature, or seem to derive from nature *more* than from a state of the inner self? De Kooning's *February* and Kline's *Laureline* are among the best pictures in the show, and they do, as Mr. Baur indicates, exhibit great space, but less because of any relation to nature and elemental forces than because they both use the surface to create space. A glance at de Kooning's *Woman,* which was hanging in the lobby, shows the difference. On the other hand, Angelo Ippolito's *Storm* which should show it, doesn't; perhaps because the picture is very colorful, bright orange and yellow, but is not built with color, and is all thick painted turgid surface—this, in spite of the fact that Mr. Baur attributes the term "landscape space" to Ippolito.

We can assume that artists respond visually to nature all the time; it is the coping trait, as it were, of the visual imagination. Equally possible is the assumption that art has a life of its own, is an independent process of changed and changing forms and encounters between sensibilities and created forms. The art of any period will show certain

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conventions exhausted, others just on the point of losing their vitality, others not yet discovered or brought forth, problems still to be explored or attacked again. Of course, all art is about "nature," derives from nature, takes its forms from nature, especially if nature is conceived on the level of ultimate meaning, essential order and rhythm, and the mysteries and manifold ways of life, as many of the artists did consider it. Then one wants to know, why this particular plastic expression of it?

Whether or not nature will seem to have been a preoccupation of our times, as it was in the eighteenth century—who of us can tell? The years between 1900 and 1925 certainly witnessed an absorption in several kinds of nature that were previously unknown or ignored, and the art of the period shows it; yet it also shows so many other things (and cubism is not distinctly an art deriving from nature), that we are at a loss to know how to understand the relationship and had better leave it to the more ambitious cultural historians. For example, I would hesitate to make too close a connection between the greater space in abstract painting and the greater contemporary consciousness of interplanetary space, although it is a connection that future critics will undoubtedly make. We should not see our own times in quite that way, I think. But when we consider how much is made of the rediscovery of classical civilization for the art and thought of the Renaissance, or how much weight balances the Elizabethan world picture and the new sciences, or how much cultural force was generated by the Industrial Revolution—then we can hardly assert the independence of abstract space from outer space. It is equally possible that our contemporary art has reached a baroque phase and intuitively selects the grandeur of space for its convention, thus responding to the demands of the history of advanced painting; because these questions of the surface and of space *are* questions of painting, are problems posed by the art itself, not by nature or science or politics or any other dimension of culture. If, in this convention of space, there seems to be, as well, a response to the contemporary consciousness, perhaps it is no more, no less, than art's proper behavior, always to some degree remote from culture, and yet at the same time a part of culture, reflecting culture and at the same time creating it.

Sonya Rudikoff

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BOOKS

THE KNOW-NOTHING BOHEMIANS

Allen Ginsberg's little volume of poems, *Howl,* which got the San Francisco renaissance off to a screaming start a year or so ago, was dedicated to Jack Kerouac ("new Buddha of American prose, who spit forth intelligence into eleven books written in half the number of years . . . creating a spontaneous bop prosody and original classic literature"), William Seward Burroughs ("author of *Naked Lunch,* an endless novel which will drive everybody mad"), and Neal Cassady ("author of *The First Third,* an autobiography . . . which enlightened Buddha"). So far, everybody's sanity has been spared by the inability of *Naked Lunch* to find a publisher, and we may never get the chance to discover what Buddha learned from Neal Cassady's autobiography, but thanks to the Viking and Grove Presses, two of Kerouac's original classics, *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans,* have now been revealed to the world. When *On the Road* appeared last year, Gilbert Milstein commemorated the event in the New York *Times* by declaring it to be "a historic occasion" comparable to the publication of *The Sun Also Rises* in the 1920's. But even before the novel was actually published, the word got around that Kerouac was the spokesman of a new group of rebels and Bohemians who called themselves the Beat Generation, and soon his photogenic countenance (unshaven, of course, and topped by an unruly crop of rich black hair falling over his forehead) was showing up in various mass-circulation magazines, he was being interviewed earnestly on television, and he was being featured in a Greenwich Village nightclub where, in San Francisco fashion, he read specimens of his spontaneous bop prosody against a background of jazz music.

Though the nightclub act reportedly flopped, *On the Road* sold well enough to hit the best-seller lists for several weeks, and it isn't hard to understand why. Americans love nothing so much as representative documents, and what could be more interesting in this Age of Sociology than a novel that speaks for the "young generation?" (The fact that Kerouac is thirty-five or thereabouts was generously not held against him.) Beyond that, however, I think that the unveiling of the Beat Generation was greeted with a certain relief by many people who

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had been disturbed by the notorious respectability and "maturity" of post-war writing. This was more like it—restless, rebellious, confused youth living it up, instead of thin, balding, buttoned-down instructors of English composing ironic verses with one hand while changing the baby's diapers with the other. Bohemianism is not particularly fashionable nowadays, but the image of Bohemia still exerts a powerful fascination—nowhere more so than in the suburbs, which are filled to overflowing with men and women who uneasily think of themselves as conformists and of Bohemianism as the heroic road. The whole point of *Marjorie Morningstar* was to assure the young marrieds of Mamaroneck that they were better off than the apparently glamorous *luftmenschen* of Greenwich Village, and the fact that Wouk had to work so hard at making this idea seem convincing is a good indication of the strength of prevailing doubt on the matter.

On the surface, at least, the Bohemianism of *On the Road* is very attractive. Here is a group of high-spirited young men running back and forth across the country (mostly hitch-hiking, sometimes in their own second-hand cars), going to "wild" parties in New York and Denver and San Francisco, living on a shoe-string (GI educational benefits, an occasional fifty bucks from a kindly aunt, an odd job as a typist, a fruit-picker, a parking-lot attendant), talking intensely about love and God and salvation, getting high on marijuana (but never heroin or cocaine), listening feverishly to jazz in crowded little joints, and sleeping freely with beautiful girls. Now and again there is a reference to gloom and melancholy, but the characteristic note struck by Kerouac is exuberance:

> We stopped along the road for a bite to eat. The cowboy went off to have a spare tire patched, and Eddie and I sat down in a kind of homemade diner. I heard a great laugh, the greatest laugh in the world, and here came this rawhide oldtimes Nebraska farmer with a bunch of other boys into the diner; you could hear his raspy cries clear across the plains, across the whole gray world of them that day. Everybody else laughed with him. He didn't have a care in the world and had the hugest regard for everybody. I said to myself, Wham, listen to that man laugh. That's the West, here I am in the West. He came booming into the diner, calling Maw's name, and she made the sweetest cherry pie in Nebraska, and I had some with a mountainous scoop of ice cream on top. "Maw, rustle me up some grub afore I have to start eatin myself or some damn silly idee like that." And he threw himself on a stool and went hyaw hyaw hyaw hyaw. "And throw some beans in it." It was the spirit of the West sitting right next to me. I wished I knew his whole raw life and what the hell he'd been doing all these years besides laughing and yelling like that. Whooee, I told my soul, and the cowboy came back and off we went to Grand Island.

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Kerouac's enthusiasm for the Nebraska farmer is part of his general readiness to find the source of all vitality and virtue in simple rural types and in the dispossessed urban groups (Negroes, bums, whores). His idea of life in New York is "millions and millions hustling forever for a buck among themselves . . . grabbing, taking, giving, sighing, dying, just so they could be buried in those awful cemetery cities beyond Long Island City," whereas the rest of America is populated almost exclusively by the true of heart. There are intimations here of a kind of know-nothing populist sentiment, but in other ways this attitude resembles Nelson Algren's belief that bums and whores and junkies are more interesting than white-collar workers or civil servants. The difference is that Algren hates middle-class respectability for moral and political reasons—the middle class exploits and persecutes—while Kerouac, who is thoroughly unpolitical, seems to feel that respectability is a sign not of moral corruption but of spiritual death. "The only people for me," says Sal Paradise, the narrator of *On the Road,* "are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars. . . ." This tremendous emphasis on emotional intensity, this notion that to be hopped-up is the most desirable of all human conditions, lies at the heart of the Beat Generation ethos and distinguishes it radically from the Bohemianism of the past.

The Bohemianism of the 1920's represented a repudiation of the provinciality, philistinism, and moral hypocrisy of American life—a life, incidentally, which was still essentially small-town and rural in tone. Bohemia, in other words, was a movement created in the name of civilization: its ideals were intelligence, cultivation, spiritual refinement. The typical literary figure of the 1920's was a midwesterner (Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, Eliot, Pound) who had fled from his home town to New York or Paris in search of a freer, more expansive, more enlightened way of life than was possible in Ohio or Minnesota or Michigan. The political radicalism that supplied the characteristic coloring of Bohemianism in the 1930's did nothing to alter the urban, cosmopolitan bias of the 1920's. At its best, the radicalism of the 1930's was marked by deep intellectual seriousness and aimed at a state of society in which the fruits of civilization would be more widely avaliable—and ultimately available to all.

The Bohemianism of the 1950's is another kettle of fish altogether. It is hostile to civilization; it worships primitivism, instinct, energy,

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"blood." To the extent that it has intellectual interests at all, they run to mystical doctrines, irrationalist philosophies, and left-wing Reichianism. The only art the new Bohemians have any use for is jazz, mainly of the cool variety. Their predilection for bop language is a way of demonstrating solidarity with the primitive vitality and spontaneity they find in jazz and of expressing contempt for coherent, rational discourse which, being a product of the mind, is in their view a form of death. To be articulate is to admit that you have no feelings (for how can real feelings be expressed in syntactical language?), that you can't respond to anything (Kerouac responds to everything by saying "Wow!"), and that you are probably impotent.

At the one end of the spectrum, this ethos shades off into violence and criminality, main-line drug addiction and madness. Allen Ginsberg's poetry, with its lurid apocalyptic celebration of "angel-headed hipsters," speaks for the darker side of the new Bohemianism. Kerouac is milder. He shows little taste for violence, and the criminality he admires is the harmless kind. The hero of *On the Road,* Dean Moriarty, has a record: "From the age of eleven to seventeen he was usually in reform school. His specialty was stealing cars, gunning for girls coming out of high school in the afternoon, driving them out to the mountains, making them, and coming back to sleep in any available hotel bathtub in town." But Dean's criminality, we are told, "was not something that sulked and sneered; it was a wild yea-saying overburst of American joy; it was Western, the west wind, an ode from the Plains, something new, long prophesied, long a-coming (he only stole cars for joy rides)." And, in fact, the species of Bohemian that Kerouac writes about is on the whole rather law-abiding. In *The Subterraneans,* a bunch of drunken boys steal a pushcart in the middle of the night, and when they leave it in front of a friend's apartment building, he denounces them angrily for "screwing up the security of my pad." When Sal Paradise (in *On the Road*) steals some groceries from the canteen of an itinerant workers' camp in which he has taken a temporary job as a barracks guard, he comments, "I suddenly began to realize that everybody in America is a natural-born thief"—which, of course, is a way of turning his own stealing into a bit of boyish prankishness. Nevertheless, Kerouac is attracted to criminality, and that in itself is more significant than the fact that he personally feels constrained to put the brakes on his own destructive impulses.

Sex has always played a very important role in Bohemianism: sleeping around was the Bohemian's most dramatic demonstration of his freedom from conventional moral standards, and a defiant denial

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of the idea that sex was permissible only in marriage and then only for the sake of a family. At the same time, to be "promiscuous" was to assert the validity of sexual experience in and for itself. The "meaning" of Bohemian sex, then, was at once social and personal, a crucial element in the Bohemian's ideal of civilization. Here again the contrast with Beat Generation Bohemianism is sharp. On the one hand, there is a fair amount of sexual activity in *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans.* Dean Moriarity is a "new kind of American saint" at least partly because of his amazing sexual power: he can keep three women satisfied simultaneously and he can make love any time, anywhere (once he mounts a girl in the back seat of a car while poor Sal Paradise is trying to sleep in front). Sal, too, is always on the make, and though he isn't as successful as the great Dean, he does pretty well: offhand I can remember a girl in Denver, one on a bus, and another in New York, but a little research would certainly unearth a few more. The heroine of *The Subterraneans,* a Negro girl named Mardou Fox, seems to have switched from one to another member of the same gang and back again ("This has been an incestuous group in its time"), and we are given to understand that there is nothing unusual about such an arrangement. But the point of all this hustle and bustle is not freedom from ordinary social restrictions or defiance of convention (except in relation to homosexuality, which is Ginsberg's preserve: among "the best minds" of Ginsberg's generation who were destroyed by America are those "who let themselves be ———— in the —— by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy, / who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love"). The sex in Kerouac's books goes hand in hand with a great deal of talk about forming permanent relationships ("although I have a hot feeling sexually and all that for her," says the poet Adam Moorad in *The Subterraneans,* "I really don't want to get any further into her not only for these reasons but finally, the big one, if I'm going to get involved with a girl now I want to be permanent like permanent and serious and long termed and I can't do that with her"), and a habit of getting married and then duly divorced and re-married when another girl comes along. In fact, there are as many marriages and divorces in *On the Road* as in the Hollywood movie colony (must be that California climate): "All those years I was looking for the woman I wanted to marry," Sal Paradise tells us. "I couldn't meet a girl without saying to myself, What kind of wife would she make?" Even more revealing is Kerouac's refusal to admit that any of his characters ever make love wantonly or lecherously—no matter how casual the encounter it must

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always entail sweet feelings toward the girl. Sal, for example, is fixed up with Rita Bettencourt in Denver, whom he has never met before. "I got her in my bedroom after a long talk in the dark of the front room. She was a nice little girl, simple and true [naturally], and tremendously frightened of sex. I told her it was beautiful. I wanted to prove this to her. She let me prove it, but I was too impatient and proved nothing. She sighed in the dark. 'What do you want out of life?' I asked, and I used to ask that all the time of girls." This is rather touching, but only because the narrator is really just as frightened of sex as that nice little girl was. He is frightened of failure and he worries about his performance. For *performance* is the point—performance and "good orgasms," which are the first duty of man and the only duty of woman. What seems to be involved here, in short, is sexual anxiety of enormous proportions—an anxiety that comes out very clearly in *The Subterraneans,* which is about a love affair between the young writer, Leo Percepied, and the Negro girl, Mardou Fox. Despite its protestations, the book is one long agony of fear and trembling over sex:

I spend long nights and many hours making her, finally I have her, I pray for it to come, I can hear her breathing harder, I hope against hope it's time, a noise in the hall (or whoop of drunkards next door) takes her mind off and she can't make it and laughs—but when she does make it I hear her crying, whimpering, the shuddering electrical female orgasm makes her sound like a little girl crying, moaning in the night, it lasts a good twenty seconds and when it's over she moans, "O why can't it last longer," and "O when will I when you do?"—"Soon now I bet," I say, "you're getting closer and closer"—

Very primitive, very spontaneous, very elemental, very beat.

For the new Bohemians interracial friendships and love affairs apparently play the same role of social defiance that sex used to play in older Bohemian circles. Negroes and whites associate freely on a basis of complete equality and without a trace of racial hostility. But putting it that way understates the case, for not only is there no racial hostility, there is positive adulation for the "happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America."

At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night. . . . I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a "white man" disillusioned. All my life I'd had white ambitions. . . . I passed the dark porches of Mexican and Negro homes; soft voices were there,

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occasionally the dusky knee of some mysterious sensuous gal; and dark faces of the men behind rose arbors. Little children sat like sages in ancient rocking chairs.

It will be news to the Negroes to learn that they are so happy and ecstatic; I doubt if a more idyllic picture of Negro life has been painted since certain Southern ideologues tried to convince the world that things were just as fine as fine could be for the slaves on the old plantation. Be that as it may, Kerouac's love for Negroes and other dark-skinned groups is tied up with his worship of primitivism, not with any radical social attitudes. Ironically enough, in fact, to see the Negro as more elemental than the white man, as Ned Polsky has acutely remarked, is "an inverted form of keeping the nigger in his place." But even if it were true that American Negroes, by virtue of their position in our culture, have been able to retain a degree of primitive spontaneity, the last place you would expect to find evidence of this is among Bohemian Negroes. Bohemianism, after all, is for the Negro a means of entry into the world of the whites, and no Negro Bohemian is going to cooperate

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in the attempt to identify him with Harlem or Dixieland. The only major Negro character in either of Kerouac's two novels is Mardou Fox, and she is about as primitive as Wilhelm Reich himself.

The plain truth is that the primitivism of the Beat Generation serves first of all as a cover for an anti-intellectualism so bitter that it makes the ordinary American's hatred of eggheads seem positively benign. Kerouac and his friends like to think of themselves as intellectuals ("they are intellectual as hell and know all about Pound without being pretentious or talking too much about it"), but this is only a form of newspeak. Here is an example of what Kerouac considers intelligent discourse—"formal and shining and complete, without the tedious intellectualness":

We passed a little kid who was throwing stones at the cars in the road. "Think of it," said Dean. "One day he'll put a stone through a man's windshield and the man will crash and die—all on account of that little kid. You see what I mean? God exists without qualms. As we roll along this way I am positive beyond doubt that everything will be taken care of for us—that even you, as you drive, fearful of the wheel . . . the thing will go along of itself and you won't go off the road and I can sleep. Furthermore we know America, we're at home; I can go anywhere in America and get what I want because it's the same in every corner, I know the people, I know what they do. We give and take and go in the incredibly complicated sweetness zigzagging every side."

You see what he means? Formal and shining and complete. No tedious intellectualness. Completely unpretentious. "There was nothing clear about the things he said but what he meant to say was somehow made pure and clear." *Somehow.* Of course. If what he wanted to say had been carefully thought out and precisely articulated, that would have been tedious and pretentious and, no doubt, *somehow* unclear and clearly impure. But so long as he utters these banalities with his tongue tied and with no comprehension of their meaning, so long as he makes noises that come out of his soul (since they couldn't possibly have come out of his mind), he passes the test of true intellectuality.

Which brings us to Kerouac's spontaneous bop prosody. This "prosody" is not to be confused with bop language itself, which has such a limited vocabulary (Basic English is a verbal treasure-house by comparison) that you couldn't write a note to the milkman in it, much less a novel. Kerouac, however, manages to remain true to the spirit of hipster slang while making forays into enemy territory (i.e., the English language) by his simple inability to express anything in words. The only method he has of describing an object is to summon up the same half-dozen adjectives over and over again: "greatest," "tremen-

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dous," "crazy," "mad," "wild," and perhaps one or two others. When it's more than just mad or crazy or wild, it becomes "really mad" or "really crazy" or "really wild." (All quantities in excess of three, incidentally, are subsumed under the rubric "innumerable," a word used innumerable times in *On the Road* but not so innumerably in *The Subterraneans.*) The same poverty of resources is apparent in those passages where Kerouac tries to handle a situation involving even slightly complicated feelings. His usual tactic is to run for cover behind cliché and vague signals to the reader. For instance: "I looked at him; my eyes were watering with embarrassment and tears. Still he stared at me. Now his eyes were blank and looking through me. . . . Something clicked in both of us. In me it was suddenly concern for a man who was years younger than I, five years, and whose fate was wound with mine across the passage of the recent years; in him it was a matter that I can ascertain only from what he did afterward." If you can ascertain what this is all about, either beforehand, during, or afterward, you are surely no square.

In keeping with its populistic bias, the style of *On the Road* is folksy and lyrical. The prose of *The Subterraneans,* on the other hand, sounds like an inept parody of Faulkner at his worst, the main difference being that Faulkner usually produces bad writing out of an impulse to inflate the commonplace while Kerouac gets into trouble by pursuing "spontaneity." Strictly speaking, spontaneity is a quality of feeling, not of writing: when we call a piece of writing spontaneous, we are registering our impression that the author hit upon the right words without sweating, that no "art" and no calculation entered into the picture, that his feelings seem to have spoken themselves, seem to have sprouted a tongue at the moment of composition. Kerouac apparently thinks that spontaneity is a matter of saying whatever comes into your head, in any order you happen to feel like saying it. It isn't the *right* words he wants (even if he knows what they might be), but the first words, or at any rate the words that most obviously announce themselves as deriving from emotion rather than cerebration, as coming from "life" rather than "literature," from the guts rather than the brain. (The brain, remember, is the angel of death.) But writing that springs easily and "spontaneously" out of strong feelings is *never* vague; it always has a quality of sharpness and precision because it is in the nature of strong feelings to be aroused by specific objects. The notion that a diffuse, generalized, and unrelenting enthusiasm is the mark of great sensitivity and responsiveness is utterly fantastic, an idea that comes from taking drunkenness or drug-addiction as the state of perfect emotional vigor. The effect of such enthusiasm is actually to wipe out the world alto-

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gether, for if a filling station will serve as well as the Rocky Mountains to arouse a sense of awe and wonder, then both the filling station and the mountains are robbed of their reality. Kerouac's conception of feeling is one that only a solipsist could believe in—and a solipsist, be it noted, is a man who does not relate to anything outside himself.

Solipsism is precisely what characterizes Kerouac's fiction. *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans* are so patently autobiographical in content that they become almost impossible to discuss as novels; if spontaneity were indeed a matter of destroying the distinction between life and literature, these books would unquestionably be It. "As we were going out to the car Babe slipped and fell flat on her face. Poor girl was overwrought. Her brother Tim and I helped her up. We got in the car; Major and Betty joined us. The sad ride back to Denver began." Babe is a girl who is mentioned a few times in the course of *On the Road*; we don't know why she is overwrought on this occasion, and even if we did it wouldn't matter, since there is no reason for her presence in the book at all. But Kerouac tells us that she fell flat on her face while walking toward a car. It is impossible to believe that Kerouac made this deail up, that his imagination was creating a world real enough to include wholly gratuitous elements; if that were the case, Babe would have come alive as a human being. But she is only a name; Kerouac never even describes her. She is in the book because the sister of one of Kerouac's friends was there when he took a trip to Central City, Colorado, and she slips in *On the Road* because she slipped that day on the way to the car. What is true of Babe who fell flat on her face is true of virtually every incident in *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans*. Nothing that happens has any dramatic reason for happening. Sal Paradise meets such-and-such people on the road whom he likes or (rarely) dislikes; they exchange a few words, they have a few beers together, they part. It is all very unremarkable and commonplace, but for Kerouac it is always the greatest, the wildest, the most. What you get in these two books is a man proclaiming that he is *alive* and offering every trivial experience he has ever had in evidence. Once I did this, once I did that (he is saying) and by God, it *meant* something! Because I *responded*! But if it meant something, and you responded so powerfully, why can't you explain what it meant, and why do you have to insist so?

I think it is legitimate to say, then, that the Beat Generation's worship of primitivism and spontaneity is more than a cover for hostility to intelligence; it arises from a pathetic poverty of feeling as well. The hipsters and hipster-lovers of the Beat Generation are rebels, all right, but not against anything so sociological and historical as the

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middle class or capitalism or even respectability. This is the revolt of the spiritually underprivileged and the crippled of soul—young men who can't think straight and so hate anyone who can; young men who can't get outside the morass of self and so construct definitions of feeling that exclude all human beings who manage to live, even miserably, in a world of objects; young men who are burdened unto death with the specially poignant sexual anxiety that America—in its eternal promise of erotic glory and its spiteful withholding of actual erotic possibility—seems bent on breeding, and who therefore dream of the unattainable perfect orgasm, which excuses all sexual failures in the real world. Not long ago, Norman Mailer suggested that the rise of the hipster may represent "the first wind of a second revolution in this century, moving not forward toward action and more rational equitable distribution, but backward toward being and the secrets of human energy." To tell the truth, whenever I hear anyone talking about instinct and being and the secrets of human energy, I get nervous; next thing you know he'll be saying that violence is just fine, and then I begin wondering whether he really thinks that kicking someone in the teeth or sticking a knife between his ribs are deeds to be admired. History, after all—and especially the history of modern times—teaches that there is a close con-

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nection between ideologies of primitivistic vitalism and a willingness to look upon cruelty and blood-letting with complacency, if not downright enthusiasm. The reason I bring this up is that the spirit of hipsterism and the Beat Generation strikes me as the same spirit which animates the young savages in leather jackets who have been running amuck in the last few years with their switch-blades and zip guns. What does Mailer think of those wretched kids, I wonder? What does he think of the gang that stoned a nine-year-old boy to death in Central Park in broad daylight a few months ago, or the one that set fire to an old man drowsing on a bench near the Brooklyn waterfront one summer's day, or the one that pounced on a crippled child and orgiastically stabbed him over and over and over again even after he was good and dead? Is that what he means by the liberation of instinct and the mysteries of being? Maybe so. At least he says somewhere in his article that two eighteen-year-old hoodlums who bash in the brains of a candy-store keeper are murdering an institution, committing an act that "violates private property"—which is one of the most morally gruesome ideas I have ever come across, and which indicates where the ideology of hipsterism can lead. I happen to believe that there is a direct connection between the flabbiness of American middle-class life and the spread of juvenile crime in the 1950's, but I also believe that juvenile crime can be explained partly in terms of the same resentment against normal feeling and the attempt to cope with the world through intelligence that lies behind Kerouac and Ginsberg. Even the relatively mild ethos of Kerouac's books can spill over easily into brutality, for there is a suppressed cry in those books: Kill the intellectuals who can talk coherently, kill the people who can sit still for five minutes at a time, kill those incomprehensible characters who are capable of getting seriously involved with a woman, a job, a cause. How can anyone in his right mind pretend that this has anything to do with private property or the middle class? No. Being for or against what the Beat Generation stands for has to do with denying that incoherence is superior to precision; that ignorance is superior to knowledge; that the exercise of mind and discrimination is a form of death. It has to do with fighting the notion that sordid acts of violence are justifiable so long as they are committed in the name of "instinct." It even has to do with fighting the poisonous glorification of the adolescent in American popular culture. It has to do, in other words, with being for or against intelligence itself.

Norman Podhoretz

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